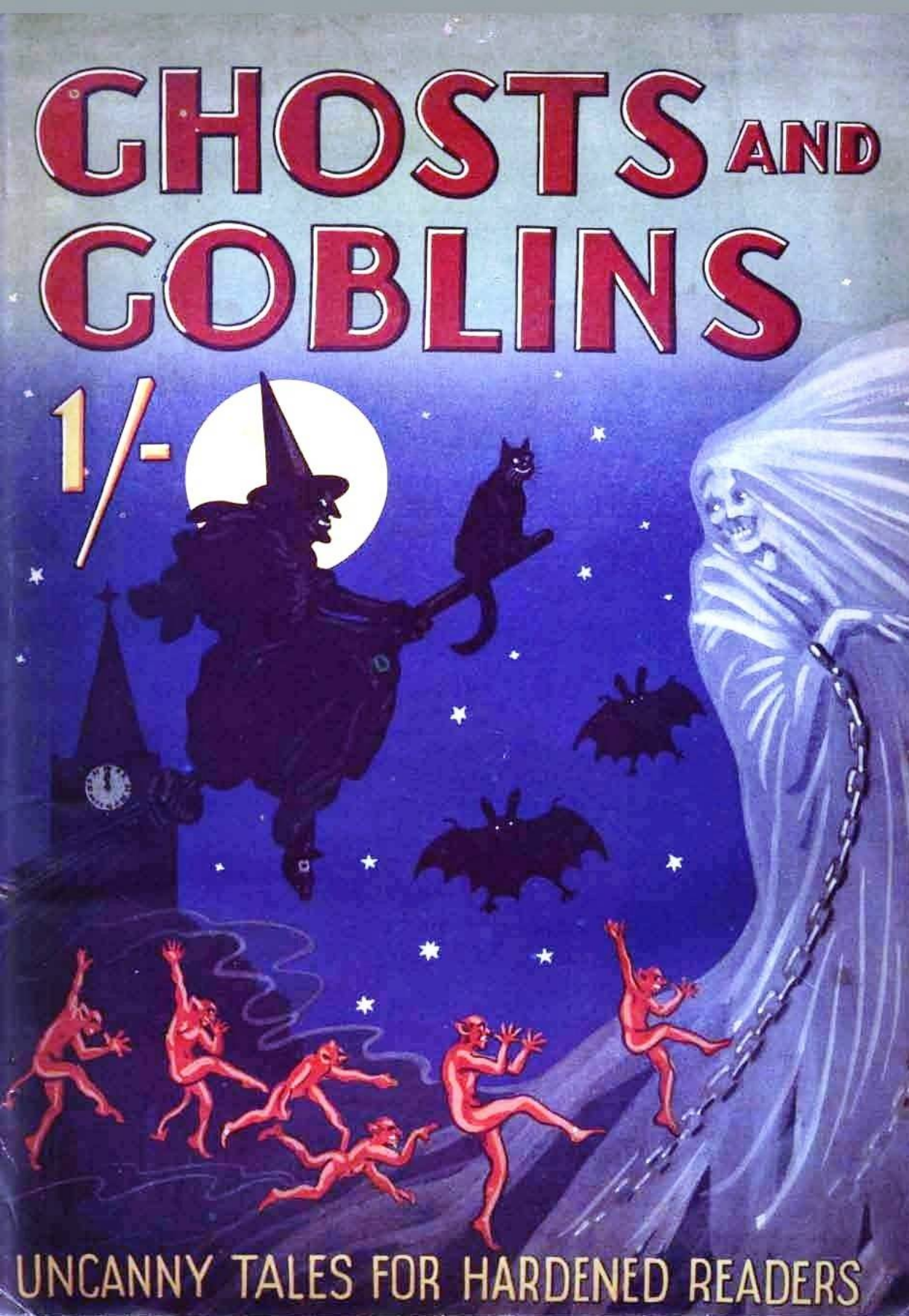
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Weird Tales
Quaint Conceits
Hair-Raising
Happenings

THE WORLD'S WORK (1913) LTD.
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GHOSTS & GOBLINS

Weird Tales Quaint Conceits

Hair-Raising Happenings

Sir Ralph's Agincourt Armour

And His Fear of Goblins and Demons

by R. THURSTON HOPKINS

YOU may not think there is a single ghost still alive in the stately homes of England these days. If you read the newspapers, you will probably get the idea that our ghostly intruders have been exposed to so much vulgar boosting and investigating by psychical researchers that they have all fled from the old country in disgust. Anyway, the newspaper reports on our ghostly inhabitants are not at all reassuring. Every day you will read such headlines as:

"RADIOGRAPH OF HAUNTED CUPBOARD AT GIBBET MANOR REVEALS THAT GHOST IS A NEST OF RATS." "THE GHOST WAS A YARD OF CHEESE-CLOTH! WOMAN SENT TO PRISON FOR FRAUDULENT MEDIUMSHIP." "'NO GHOSTS IN THE TOWER OF LONDON, SAYS A YEOMAN OF THE GUARD WHO HAS LIVED THERE FORTY YEARS."

Anyway, Peter Bawtree Gifford did not read newspapers. They seemed too full of trouble and crime; of stocks and shares—other people's stocks and shares, of course. Peter, who was a city clerk, had nothing left to invest out of his salary of three pounds a week after he had paid for his diggings in Brixton and his dinners in the City.

No, he did not bother to read newspapers. He saved his shillings to buy books and music score paper and stamps. Peter was that terrible and yet wonderful thing, an unknown composer.

At the time this story opens he had composed several dance tunes which had been the round of all the London music publishers and had all returned to him with the unerring speed of homing pigeons. It did not seem to do Peter any good that the sort of music he composed was just a little bit "unusual."

And it must be admitted that our composer was not a good showman and salesman. He was too shy and nervous to bang on the big drum and shout his wares.

That, I think, is all you need know

about Peter Giffard before his lucky star flashed twice in the sky and interrupted the dreary monotony of his days. The first flash killed his only relative—an aged and somewhat eccentric aunt who lived in an ancient manor house on the Sussex Downs. The second flash arranged his exit from the counting-house of Messrs. Grab, Graball and Grabbit.

This famous law firm had been holding the sack over Peter's head for some months; but his lucky star certainly arranged that the sack should descend on the day he learned that his aunt had left him the ancient house in Sussex and all that she possessed, which was a little over six hundred pounds.

The sack was a blessing travelling incognito, for without it Peter Giffard might have invested Aunt Bawtree's money in gilt-edged stock and continued his ineffectual and humdrum life in the counting-house. With the sack Peter became a changed man. He suddenly became alert and ready to seize Mr. Opportunity and drag him through his doorway.

His aunt's solicitor handed him a letter which brought corrugations of perplexity to Peter's forehead as he read it.

"Dear Peter" [it ran], "By the time you will read this letter I shall have passed into some other world. Well, I've lived a long and happy life in the ancestral home with my beloved Downs around me, and when my time comes I shall not cringe or beg an extension. I have made my will, in which I bequeath to you my house and whatever money I may possess at the time I bid this world adieu.

"As you know, Bawtree Manor has been held by our family from time immemorial and our dead are buried three coffin deep in the old church. Although I leave the house to you, and you will become legally seized and possessed of it, it will never be wholly yours. It was never entirely mine. There is someone else who has always had ineradicable claims on it.

"If you ever take up your residence in Bawtree, you will soon become aware of this occupant. He is Sir Ralph Bawtree—or I should say the apparition of Sir Ralph who died and was buried in the year 1476.

"For the last twenty years Sir Ralph Bawtree and I have been on the most friendly terms. In late years he was my counsellor and guide and I never made any decisions about my business or household affairs without first taking his opinion. He never once misled me.

"Dear Sir Ralph; I owe him a great deal! Yes, Peter, don't laugh or think your poor old aunt was crazy. I really do owe Sir Ralph a great deal. He helped me to find happiness in my old age, and he made me understand that Death is far more wonderful than life.

"If the contents of this letter have not already over-leapt the bounds of all human belief, I should once again beg you to believe that I am not crazy. But I can only repeat that the ghost of Sir Ralph is perhaps the one real and abiding thing in Bawtree Manor, and if you ever meet him you will find that he is a charming and courteous ghost and capable of giving you considerable help in your everyday life.

"Do be kind to Sir Ralph! Indeed, always be kind of ghosts; they are such sensitive things. Few people give any thought to the supernatural in these days, and the way some of the old families are treating their family ghosts is simply scandalous.

"Only the other day I read that Lord Worthing allowed the B.B.C. to set up their wretched microphones in the haunted chamber occupied by the Headless Lady of Hampleton. No wonder that the Headless Lady retired to her comfortable lead coffin and stayed there till these wireless people had returned to London!

"As our dear Vicar often said in his sermons, the world is so mercenary and irreligious nowadays.

"Well, dear boy, this is my last good-bye to you. I hope you will live a long and happy life. Believe me, ever in this world and the next, your affectionate aunt,

"JANE BAWTREE."

"P.S.—I have just repeated the multiplication table to myself, to make sure I am perfectly sane, and I find that my brain is working splendidly."

Even now while Peter was reading this amazing document, it suggested a gorgeous advertising stunt for placing his dance tunes before the public. He was sure that Aunt Bawtree would have no objection if he entered into a partnership with the family ghost to build up the family name and fortune once again. Thinking over the whole thing, the idea grew more and more attractive; and after allowing a month or two to elapse, out of respect for Aunt Bawtree, he succumbed to it and commenced to make preparations for boosting his theme song entitled "Dancing with a Ghost."

He had then moved in to Bawtree Manor House, ten miles inland from Lidoville-on-Sea, that abounding and blatent new seaside resort on the Sussex coast. The manor is a fine old partly-timbered house standing on a ledge of Windover Down. You reach it by a wavy-faced flagged path over a great still lawn and pass into the hall through a lichened and weather-worn stone porch dating from the days of Henry VIII.

The Southdown Motor Coaches take the manor house in their circular tours of lovely Sussex. Also many motor-cars filled with visitors drive up. This was something that was very favourable to Peter's scheme. When the idea for boosting his music came to him, this solitary old house seemed heaven-sent.

GHOST MUSIC

"No musical publisher will accept my music for what it is worth," Peter argued. "And so it behoves me to whoosh it on them as spirit music composed by the family ghost. That's the stuff!" he muttered, rejoicing and expanding.

"Who is this Sir Ralph Bawtree who composed, 'I Raise my Hat to my Shadow'?"

That's what everybody is going to ask—at least, I hope so. I'll tell the world about my dear aunt's pet ghost. Spread it about. Shout it—loud! Whoosh! Oh, the fun of it! A ghost on the go—A REAL LIVE ANCESTRAL GHOST! Whooshing it on the publishers and concert agents. Why not? You can put anything over if you hammer on the door long enough. Just like the Oxford Group and Christian Science."

Peter had engaged a village maid, Emma Hickstead, to do "light" cooking and house-work, and had retained the help of Mrs. Foghel, an ancient dame who had been in Aunt Bawtree's service for many years. Mrs. Foghel was one of the village gossips, and he looked upon her as his local broadcasting station.

His idea was to allow the "secret" of his experiments on spiritualism to leak out as local gossip in the first place, and so whenever Mrs. Foghel was working in the house he behaved with studious strangeness. The old woman went back to her home frightened. She told her family that Mr. Giffard was acting "fair daft":

"He's even more scatty than old Jane Bawtree ever was. He's that excited

about some tune he is a writing on that it simply puts my nerves on edge to be in the house with him. 'E was knocking things about and dancing in the long oak gallery just like a blooming haunted spirit."

The words Peter muttered were extremely significant.

" 'E said to me," Mrs. Foghel said, "these ere London folk be darn fools. They don't believe in ghosts like my Aunt Bawtree did. But I believe in 'em, Mrs. Foghel. And I believe that a ghost could sing and dance and write songs just as well as any beefy living fellow.

" 'Do you know, Mrs. Foghel, I met the ghost of Sir Ralph last night in the Long Gallery and we spent quite a jolly evening together. I find that he was flautist at the court of Henry V. We are working together on a wonderful theme tune called "Dancing with a Ghost." The whole country will ring with that dance tune once we have finished it?' "

Tom Foghel, the old woman's son, was one of the two village policemen stationed at Windover. He listened to what his mother had to say, and said in a lofty way that these:

"Jazz band musicians were funny coves an' were full of this 'ere hartistic temperament."

He also hinted that Mr. Giffard was pulling his mother's leg.

"I calls it something more than leg-pulling," Mrs. Foghel announced at length. "Fair flying in the face of Providence. Why, last night he had all the lights turned out in the long gallery and asked that dance-crazy little hussy Emma Hickstead to dance while he played his new bit of music, 'Dancing with a Ghost.' Said that 'unseen fingers' influenced the keys of the piano. It's unholy, Tom—unholy."

"Rot," answered Tom. "When I was off duty the other night Mr. Giffard and me 'ad a pint of beer together just like human beings, and I think he's a very sensible young fellow. I tell you he's been pulling your leg."

"Don't you have nothing nohow to do with such pranks, my boy, or you and me will be having words." Mrs. Foghel shook an admonitory finger at Constable Foghel, and retired slowly to her kitchen.

GOINGS ON

Soon the whole village was talking about the "goings on" at Bawtree Manor. Ghost dances and ghost music. Ghost parties, seances, ghost hunts. Later two or three London journalists came down to interview Peter. They pelted him with questions.

What did he think about the future of ghost music? Did he think it would be possible to induce ghosts of such masters as Beethoven and Chopin to produce new work through the automatic writings of a medium? Had he actually seen the apparition of his ghostly collaborator? Or was he only an unseen influence which pervaded Bawtree Manor? Do you believe in the old-fashioned ghosts with clanking chains or the modernistic kind which turn tables and write mysterious messages on paper in glass cases?

"I can't say anything about other ghosts," said Peter, very much in a flutter under the quick fire of the reporters. "But . . . but . . . er . . . er . . . our ghost is a very real and jolly fellow . . . er . . . quite jolly. He is not old-fashioned in his ideas, but certainly he looks rather old-fashioned in his suit of armour."

And the pencils of the Sunday papers scribbled: "Doesn't believe in the modern ghosts. Believes in the good old-fashioned brimstone and blood spooks."

"And now tell us if it is true that you are putting on a spook musical show?"

"Yes, that is correct," said Peter, "if you choose to call music induced by Hertzian waves 'spook music.' I think of it as something a little more dignified."

A few months later Peter was able

to interest James Flansham, a well-known theatrical magnate, in his ghost music. Mr. Flansham sat at an enormous glass-topped desk surrounded by newspapers and cigar ashes.

"Well, Mr. Giffard, I like your music: it strikes a new note. Yes, certainly, it is quite a haunting melody. I've thought it over a lot and it seems to me a mistake to take a theatre to start with, anyway. You see, you would need to put up £700—a lot of money, laddie; and it might be a flop. I don't want to see you fleeced of every penny you have.

"Now what I propose is much better and it won't take more than £200. I propose a thirty-minutes show at the Excelsum Theatre. We'll call it 'Dancing with a Ghost' and make it dignified—something that will impress the public. I shall get a good artist to knock up some scenery—a kind of enchanted forest with ghostly white flowers and a great cold crystal moon. When it's lighted I'll bet it'll look quite well. A few stuffed rabbits and giant toadstools will give the whole thing a kind of natural appearance.

Then we'll want a hidden chorus and a crooning jazz-band. They sing and play just before the curtain goes up. That'll put a ghostly atmosphere over the audience before we shoot your stuff. Then I know a new girl dancer. Babs Danielli, a regular Salome. She's got a kind of slinky movement which will just tone in with the tune. . . .

The first night of Peter's musical show came at last. DANCING WITH A GHOST blazed in lights above the entrance to the Excelsum Theatre. James Flansham, a cigar between his teeth, greeted his friends among the crowd pouring into the marble and chromium steel vestibule. Beside him stood Peter Giffard feeling like a boy about to play a tin whistle solo in St. Paul's Cathedral.

"Good luck, James! . . . Well, you are going to show us something new tonight, eh, old boy? . . ."

Newspaper critics, first-nighters, society hangers-on, film stars—they were all there. They slapped Giffard on the back, indulged in quick whispered jokes about making the ghost walk, smoked fat cigars, decided that the show was going to make him famous.

And always London made the background. Young faces, old faces, painted lips and rosy cheeks, dark eyes, gleaming eyes, rags and battered shoes, wide white shoulders wrapped in warmest furs, glad faces, tired faces, sad faces.

"Dancing with a Ghost" was to come on after the interval. Peter's show and Miss Lulu Biffo's Dancing Girls were the principal attractions of the vaudeville programme. At last all was ready. The singers hidden in the enchanted wood had begun the theme song. The moon gleamed whitely on the scene. The curtains swung back and Miss Danielli floated on the stage trailing clouds of diaphanous drapings.

FLOP

But by some twist of fate, what might have been a perfectly good show, was doomed to misfortune from the start. Somehow the girl kicked a stuffed rabbit across the stage and it fell on a jazz drum in the orchestra with a deep resonant boom. There was a ripple of laughter from the audience. This minor calamity flustered Miss Danielli and she tripped and clutched one of the great oak-trees. It fell forward with a bang. A hidden musician stood there awkwardly clutching a saxaphone. . . .

Someone whistled in the gallery. There was a burst of laughter. Several people left their seats and hurried to

the bar. One heard waggish remarks and jibes . . . then a storm of cat-calls from the gallery.

"Curtain! Band!" someone yelled.

A moment later the stage was filled with tough-looking men in shirt-sleeves. The magic wood behaved much more magically than it had during the show —it flew up the cavernous opening above the stage and remained there suspended between earth and heaven. Property men tore up ghost cobwebs, paper grass and giant toadstools.

"Excuse me, sir!" said a scene-shifter. He brushed by Peter with the "cold crystal moon" in one hand and a bunch of paper hemlock flowers in the other.

And that was how London dropped the curtain on Peter's hopes of fame as a musician.

Peter stood in the lobby of the theatre in a maze. He shuddered as he again lived through that moment when Miss Danielli kicked a stuffed rabbit into the drum. Suddenly a very pretty, a really attractive girl with smooth dark hair came hurrying out of the theatre. He drew aside to allow this hurricane of charm and beauty to pass, and as he did so he dropped a leather music-case he was carrying. She tripped over it and fell sprawling on the puce carpet.

She said something which sounded like "jam," and groped about to pick up her vanity-bag, fur and a roll of paper.

"Oh! Look what you've done," she cried. "There goes my bag and 'Dancing with a Ghost.' Not that I want that silly dance—not after to-night."

"Dancing wih a Ghost," said Peter. He stooped and helped the lady to her feet. "So you don't think much of this dance song?"

"Well, Mr. Giffard's ghost music may be a knock-out down at Windover, but he's a frost in little old London."

"Are you interested in music—professionally?"

"Gee! No. I'm over here on a holiday. I'm an American: you do not need me to tell you that, I suppose."

"Oh, I'm sorry you're not interested in music," Peter said glumly. "You see, I composed 'Dancing with a Ghost' and I was hoping I might play it over to someone who might really appreciate that it has a certain haunting charm of its own."

Miss Betty Nostrand, from the U.S.A., looked at Peter for the first time.

"What do you mean? Say, are you the man who owns that family ghost down in Sussex? If so, I'm certainly interested. I'll say I am." The girl who was not at all embarrassed, looked at him quizzically. "But Mr. Whatever-your-name-is . . ."

"Peter Giffard."

"But Mr. Giffard, I suppose the ghost is only a phoney one—like your enchanted forest?"

IMPUDENCE

This seemed to Peter the most astonishing impudence. The girl must be reproved.

"Our family ghost is quite an authentic one," he said stiffly. "He's Sir Ralph Bawtree and he's just as genuine as your Statue of Liberty. I am one of his descendants as my name indicates—Peter Bawtree Giffard of Bawtree Manor, Sussex, England—at your service."

"Gee—the way you unroll that name and address is just thrilling. You might be answering the roll-call after Agincourt or telling Duke William how to write it out in the Domesday Book."

"Sir Ralph," replied Peter with slow deliberation, "did answer the roll-call after Agincourt."

"Gee—that's the swellest romantic thing I ever heard of," cried Miss Nostrand; "and if Pop hears about this I shall have him flipping across on the *Queen Mary* before you can say knife."

Peter raised his eyebrows.

"And don't look so sorrowful about it, Mr. Peter," she continued. "It's not going to hurt you any. Pop's made up his mind to buy an English manor house and an English ghost, and, if as you say, you are little shy in the bank balance, why Pop's worth a million dollars and is willing to behave generously."

"But——" and Peter hesitated, for he could think of so many objections. He chose one of the most harmless. "How can I sell Sir Ralph? Aunt Bawtree would never forgive me if I did."

"Well how about letting Pop and I hire Sir Ralph for twelve months. Say, Mr. Peter, that gets around it. I'll come and give Bawtree Manor a look over when you say the word."

"But Miss Nostrand, you do not understand. I am out to sell my music; not ghosts, if you don't mind my saying so."

Peter spoke with such acrimony that Miss Nostrand laughed, and he had to laugh, and then they looked into each other's eyes, and possibly, both were pierced by the arrows of love at first sight without even knowing it.

"Say, isn't there a restaurant somewhere near here? I'm just as hungry as can be. Come along, Mr. Giffard, I must hear some more about Sir Ralph. It's all just too swell to be missed."

Peter led her into a small restaurant in Coventry Street. He made himself comfortable, while Miss Nostrand ordered food for two without consulting him in any way, and it was a meal that was remarkably good to eat, but, Peter thought, would be disastrous to pay for. The cavaire and champagne would set him back two or three pounds.

"Say, isn't this the craziest thing!" she cried, giving him a dazzling smile. "Twenty minutes ago we had not met, now we are almost old friends. And I'm coming down to Bawtree Manor to-morrow to meet Sir Ralph. That's settled, isn't it? Now listen—I'm paying for these eats to-night because I kind of stampeded you into this.

"No, no. You must let me pay . . . if it's all the same to you."

"Peter Bawtree Giffard, I said this banquet is on me," Miss Nostrand interposed firmly. "And anyway I'll dine with you when I come to Bawtree Manor . . . er . . . that is if it's all the same to you," she concluded, parodying him.

I will not attempt to follow the fortunes of our hero from point to point. He met Miss Nostrand frequently, and gradually they became close friends. To each other they became successively Betty and Peter and Bet and Pete.

Miss Nostrand came down to Windover and put up at the "Dog and Duck" inn. Peter knew now, only too well, that he was falling fathoms deep in love with her. He tried to think of everything which would be unfavourable to such a love match. She was spoilt, these rich American girls thought they could buy everything in the world with their almighty dollars. She was brassy and cheeky. She was an unquiet spirit rushing here and there in search of sensation, amusement and pleasure.

Besides, reason told him that this sudden infatuation was absurd, that he hardly knew the girl a few weeks; that she was worth a million dollars and he was almost a pauper; that her whole background was different from his; and even if they ever married it would probably turn out a disastrous mistake.

But it was no good—he could not dismiss the memory of that blue-black hair, the magpie flash of her dark eyes, the set of her red lips. Sometimes, after a day's tramp over the Downs with Betty, he would return to the gloomy old manor house, and sitting beside the log fire try to recapture the little intimacies of appearance he had noticed during the day—the soft down

on her arms which turned golden in the sunlight, the way she always clutched his arm at one point below the shoulder, the little blue birth-mark on her bronzed neck, the blue shadows which lurked beneath her eyes when a long tramp fatigued her. These foolish things gave him quick spasms of heart-ache.

CRASH

One evening Betty came across the lawn with a cable in her hand.

"It's from Pop." Peter was looking into blurred eyes. into blurred, upraised eyes. "Dreadful news, Peter. His bank has crashed. You see he was president of the Peoples' Trust Company of New York—every dollar he possessed was in it. Poor old Pop." She choked with tears. "Oh! Peter, dear, my heart aches. I always said to Pop let's get out of all this big business and live a quiet life over in England. And he always said, 'soon . . . I've just one more big deal to put over.' Men oughtn't to go on and on giving their souls to business. Ambition took him and blew him up like a silly toy balloon and then smashed him. Why couldn't Pop leave it alone?" She kept repeating in a whisper as they went towards the frowning porch of Bawtree Manor.

Peter turned and got a moonlight gleam of tears on Betty's face. No words came to his aid. He merely looked down at her quivering figure. She looked so pathetically humbled.

"It's awful to think of him there in New York," said Betty staring before her with eyes of despair. "At bay and broken. I must go back to him by the next boat."

"Yes, of course," Peter answered hurriedly. "I will help you to make all arrangements. You must not worry too much, Bet. . . . Things may not be quite so hopeless as you fear. I hate to think of you going. I never thought I'd be so——"

Betty's brow wrinkled and she looked away. "Dear Pete," she breathed very low.

"Suppose your father came to England instead of your returning to New York," he put to her slowly. "Look here, I've got an idea. Cable your father to come to England and you can both put up at Bawtree Manor. I have my own two rooms in the west wing you can have the rest of the place rent free. What say to that?"

"That," said Betty, "is a heavenly way to get round it, and just like you—you dear old fellow. But we're not quite broke. I still have a modest $2,000 a year of my own. I couldn't ask you to turn the manor into a hotel."

"But why not be my guests?" Peter argued. "You admit that your father is just mad about old houses, ghosts and quaint English customs. Well, a month here would steady his nerves and give him a fresh interest in life. Now doesn't that sound good sense?"

"Well," demurred Betty. "We might take a cottage in the village."

"But why do that when this place is simply crying for the sunny influence of a vivid and beautful girl of your type."

Betty raised eyes which held the radiance of stars.

"Mr. Bawtree Gifford, of Bawtree Manor, Sussex, England," she asked, "are you telling me that I am vivid and beautiful."

"Wel, yes," said Peter with a ghost of a shy smile. "In my opinion you are vivacious and . . . and very beautiful. That is if you'll allow me to speak so intimately."

"Gee—I'll say I'll allow you to call

me beautiful. The way you said that. You might have been writing it on a description ticket for a museum piece."

"Sorry," said Peter. "I am afraid I am no courtier. I say things in such a terrible flat-footed way. You see, I've never mixed with womenfolk. Aunt Bawtree was about the only woman friend I ever had. I don't remember my mother . . . you see she died when I was a baby . . ."

For a few seconds Miss Nostrand was filled with an unreasonable wave of emotion. She felt she wanted to take Peter in her firm strong arms and kiss him.

Betty cabled to Pop and twenty-four hours later received an answer:

"Saved $50,000 out of the crash. Not bad as estimated. On my way to England to meet your Ghost. Love.—Pop."

ENTER SIR RALPH

By this time Peter realised that life without Betty would be impossible. The thought of her coloured everything he did. But how could he ask Betty to marry him? He had made a disgraceful mess of his life; lost his job, lost his money, and almost lost hope. For an hour or more he sat in the twilight rumpling his hair and emitting muttered ejaculations, which might have been construed as expressions of acute physical pain and groans of despair.

But after much wasted time and thought he walked over and pushed the bell. Mrs. Foghel appeared mysteriously from the cavernous "innards" of the servants quarters.

"Ah, Mrs. Foghel, I gathered from my solicitor that my aunt left a few dozen of very fine old brandy in the cellars. I think this is an occasion on which a bottle might be opened with beneficial results."

Peter was just about to pour himself a third glass of aunt's 1840 when a curious noise in the corridor attracted his attention. It sounded like the clank of metal, and it seemed to be coming nearer every moment. He placed the bottle on the table, got up and opened the door.

He heard the clock striking twelve. He was quite calm, and felt his pulse, which seemed to be "ticking over" quite normally. The strange noise still continued and with it he heard distinctly the sound of footsteps.

"Is that you, Sir Ralph. Come right in. I've been expecting to see you for some time."

Peter spoke up as if from some deep well of divination. He could not have explained what power within him urged him to speak those words.

The next moment he saw an old man walk slowly into the room. His eyes were kindly: his hair was bobbed and fell just short of his collar. His garments, which were of antique cut, were of some dark green fabric bound with velvety dull yellow leather. A large sword hung at his side and spurs were on his boots.

"My dear Sir Ralph," said Peter, "do join me in a glass of dear Aunt Bawtree's brandy."

"Thank you, Peter," he said brightly. "That's a good idea. I am much relieved to find that you are not going to treat me like an escaped lunatic or a noise-effects man at a theatre. One or two of your family have expected me to rattle my chains, groan through keyholes and walk about the house every night. That kind of thing can be very wearing to the nerves."

"I expect you to sit down and drink a friendly glass," replied Peter by way of greeting.

"Well, when you put it like that," said Sir Ralph, placing his helmet on the table. I must say it all seems very homely."

He dropped into an arm-chair and accepted a glass of the golden spirit.

"This is good sound brandy. It is very difficult to get a man's drink these days. Only last night I popped across to Longpat Hall to have a quick one, and there was nothing left but a bottle of Green Demon cocktail, such stuff as only the perverted taste of modern England could have invented. It tied my tongue in knots and sent pins and needles through my vitals."

"Well, Sir Ralph, how do you find things in the realms of færie. I'll wager, a little more tranquil than in our concrete world of to-day, with its rush and muddle, murders, sudden deaths and rumour of war every morning."

"My God!" cried Sir Ralph, at once straightening up in the arm-chair. "You don't know what we ghosts have had to contend with in the last twenty years. My dear Peter, the whole ghost world has changed—and not for the better I can tell you.

"First of all, this radio business has been a terrifying experience for all of us. Everywhere we go we trip over wireless waves. They hit us and bore through us. I was riding down my enemies last night and my horse and I went a crasher on account of them.

"You see, we move in a different space: we are all over the time dimension. Space is a bodily condition, but we are out of our bodies, and occupy all parts of the ether, so you see the wireless waves simply drill us through and through. I tell you, it is not too pleasant to be chased across the fluid of space by the tone-waves of a jazz band or shaken to death by the vibrations of a cinema organ."

"Tough luck, that, Sir Ralph," Peter murmured, but he could not help laughing.

GOBLINS AND DEMONS

Then Sir Ralph spoke again, and his voice sounded like the sighing of the wind.

"You needn't laugh," he said sadly. "Foolish people come to our haunts looking for us and when they see us they are frightened. But they don't think how frightened we are. I am frightened *now*."

"Frightened? What are you frightened about, Sir Ralph?"

"Goblins and demons," he said, glancing over his shoulder. "This old house is full of 'em. They hang in festoons from the oak beams across the long gallery and they drop on one all of a sudden. It's all your aunt's fault. I told her over and over again that the only thing to scare goblins and demons away is electric light, but, as you know, she would never have any other illumination but candles. Now, Peter, do for goodness' sake take pity on me and have electric light installed at once."

"Did you ask Aunt Bawtree to have electric light put in the manor?"

"Yes," said Sir Ralph, rather sheepishly, "but she said I was an old fool to be frightened at goblins Your aunt was quite a notable woman, but she did not look after my comfort as she should have done. No light in my room—I am forced to emit the ghastly green light I generally reserve for haunting before I can see to put on my armour. No hot-water pipes—how would you like to go about the house dressed only in a shroud, spotted with churchyard mould, in twelve degrees of frost?"

After much pleasant conversation and making arrangements to meet once a week for a friendly glass and an exchange of views, Sir Ralph finished his brandy and rose to his feet.

"Before you go——" Peter began.

"Well?" asked Sir Ralph.

"It's like this, Sir Ralph. I've squandered all the family fortune on a silly, mad theatrical stunt, and now I'm fairly in the soup. I was wondering if you could give me any kind of help. I don't want to sell Bawtree Manor—I don't suppose it would bring in more than £2,000 anyway. I want to hold on to the old home. But how? You go and talk things over with Sir Ralph if you're ever in trouble. Aunt Bawtree said. He's the only man who can help the Bawtree family."

"Indeed," said Sir Ralph. "Did she?" and looked very flattered. "I doubt if I can help you." Sir Ralph's eyes clouded. "I am so sorry, but you see I have no earthly possessions of any kind. Just one suit of armour and a few rusty chains."

"But can't you think of some money-making scheme—something to tide one over a bad patch," Peter persisted.

Sir Ralph was just a little embarrassed.

"I am afraid my mind is not a commercial one. I have my limitations. I can't creat money. And as I said I have no possessions of any value. But wait! I wonder. My suit of armour is gold damascened work. Must be worth £10,000. I was reading that the Aubrey de Vere suit, which seemed very similar to mine was sold to the Metropolitan Museum of New York for £25,000. I always keep my armour in a locker of the gable-room at the top of the servants stairway. I'll look it up for you to-morrow. Who-oo-oo, lucky I thought of that. £10,000 would set you right. Eh?"

DREAM ARMOUR

"What did I dream last night? It was something ridiculous," said Peter to himself, as he smoked his morning pipe in the library. "I remember I laughed when I woke up about two o'clock. Oh yes, about the family ghost. It was all so perfectly ridiculous. That confounded theme tune 'Walking with a Ghost,' has gone to my head, invaded my inner consciousness.

"I knew that there was something wrong somewhere, even while I was sleeping. Aunt Bawtree's brandy is a cordial that must be approached and savoured with respect. My head feels quite muzzy. How many nights have I been dreaming about Sir Ralph? One or twenty?

"The old boy seems to have taken quite a little niche of his own in my dreams. He has dropped a pinch of salt on the tail of my dream life. What was it the old boy said about a suit of armour? Ah yes: the Aubrey de Vere suit of fluted armour which was sold to the Metropolitan Museum of New York . . . made £25,000. . . ."

Peter mused for a space.

"How absurd! A suit of armour could not be worth £25,000! or could it? Did the Metropolitan Museum really pay such a sum for . . ."

Peter stopped short.

"Is there such a place as the Metropolitan Museum of New York?" he said aloud. "If so it's queer that I should first hear about it in a dream. Infernally queer!"

Peter moved towards the telephone book, turned up the number of the British Museum, and phoned up.

"You there? Could you put me in touch with someone who is an expert on armour? Thank you. . . . Oh, sorry to trouble you, but can you tell me when the Aubrey de Vere suit of armour was sold in London?"

The curator's voice came back quite distinctly: "Yes, the suit was sold in 1938 to the Metropolitan Museum at New York. It was formerly the property of Lord Cranston. Yes, it made the considerable sum of £25,000."

"Great Scott!" Peter said. He was excited and not a little scared. "How did I come to know about the de Vere

armour? How could I dream of a thing I had never heard about before? Hallucinations do not provide one with such exact details."

It became evident to Peter that Sir Ralph had appeared in a dream and told him about the de Vere armour. There was no other explanation. It all seemed so infernally mysterious.

Peter must have been sitting there in the library for some hours. All at once he noticed a certain faint sweetness in the musty surroundings of the dim library. He looked up. Betty was standing in the doorway.

"Hello, Pete," she said. "You're an old hermit. Fancy sitting in this dusty stuff old room on a beautiful morning like this. Come out and dance and sing and skip and jump."

Peter cocked a grey eye at her.

"This place needs a woman's touch. I—look here, Betty. I've been mad about you ever since that night I met you at the theatre. I have hesitated a hundred times on the point of telling you I love you. But you've got to hear it now. And you need someone to look after you. What about letting me do the job. Could you—do you think you could stand it all—Bawtree Manor and the ghost and me?"

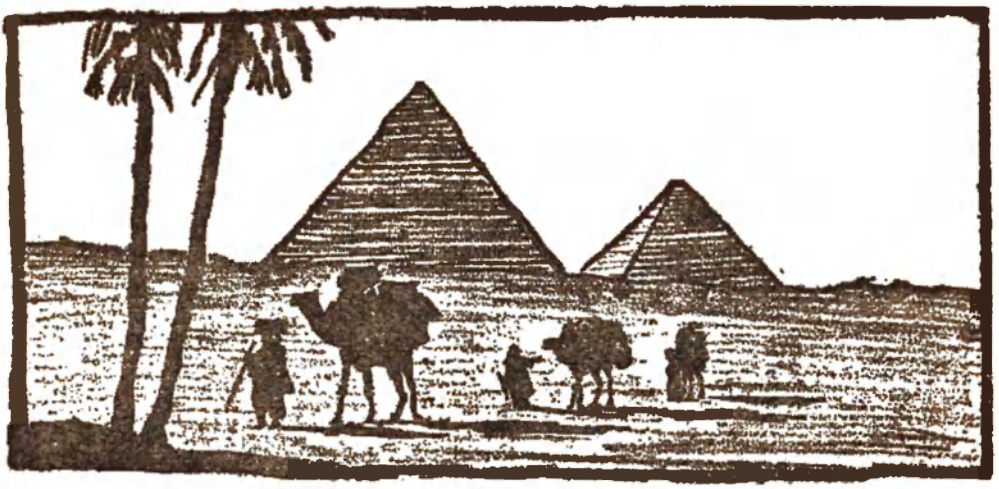
She said:

"Gee, I'll love signing my name Betty Nostrand Bawtree Giffard, of Bawtree Manor, Windover, Sussex, Eng."

That was along the latter end of July. Early in September they were married, and just to cheer the old Manor House up a little, Peter had electric light installed in all rooms. Peter did not forget Sir Ralph's little den—the Gable Room. A hundred-watt bulb just to scare away the goblins!

Part of the wainscoting was cleared away during the alterations and the reader will naturally suppose that a skeleton—say that of Sir Ralph Bawtree—was discovered behind it. That was not so.

What they did find was a complete suit of armour. An official who came down from the British Museum to value it was much excited by the discovery. He said it was almost as fine as the Aubrey de Vere suit—possibly worth £10,000. . . .



The Head of Ekillon

The Story of a Curse and a Reincarnation

by HENRY RAWLE

FOR nearly ten years I had neither seen nor heard of Michael Roone, and it was with some surprise that I received from him a message, the strange urgency of which I could not well ignore.

Always he had been something of an enigma to me; possibly his activities in the realms of archæology did much to enhance this impression of mine, for this dark science has ever imbued me with a vague sense of the mysterious. Among his more suspicious country neighbours he had the reputation almost of a mystic, and the old manor house on the hill where he had lived and worked for so many years in seclusion was certainly remarkable in its immunity from visitors.

However, knowing my friend to be a man of great sincerity and one who would not thus appeal to me without good reason, I at once set off for that remote part of Sussex where was his home. Arrived at the gloomy old house, I found him in a state of agitation foreign to his usual nonchalance; a nervousness which, I perceived, he was at great pains to conceal.

Even after dinner when we had adjourned to the more comfortable atmosphere of the library, he seemed strangely reluctant to broach the real object of my visit. For some time, with a fine affectation of naturalness, we discussed things in general and talked as friends will, smoking the while; presently, however, with an abruptness which was almost startling, he came to the point.

"Look here, John, old fellow," he blurted out, "you must know that I've not brought you all this way for nothing. You may have suspected from my message that there is something of unusual strangeness which I must tell you of. More than that, I want advice; I must have someone to help me gain a proper perspective of things.

"Queer things have been happening in this house of late; unnatural things. Happenings of a nature unutterably

weird for which I can find no name, no explanation, unless it be within the grim realms of approaching madness. . . ."

He broke off suddenly, glancing in furtive apprehension about the room.

"Tell me," he jerked out, "what do you think; would you take me for a madman?"

He almost glared at me.

"Certainly not," I retorted. "I might suspect you of nerves, but madness, never. For one thing a maniac never knows, never suspects his madness."

His relief was plain to see; he went on.

"It was soon after I had come into possession of the decapitated mummy that this—this persecution began. It is a wonderful specimen: the preservation is remarkable, although the hieroglyphics on the mummy-case are of a character entirely unknown to me. The aspect of the thing is certainly repulsive; the expression on the face is most malevolent; it conveys an irresistible impression of evil.

"How the head first came apart from the body there is no means of knowing; but this I know, that although time and again I have replaced the hideous thing in its proper position, nothing, at least no ruse of mine, can keep it there! I tell you, my friend, that I have watched it lifted in the air as though by some unseen hand and flung—flung, I say, across the room!

"And that is not all. There are strange noises about the house at night; incredible dreams disturb my rest.

More than once I have awakened suddenly from deep sleep to find crouching over my bed with awful intentness a shadow vague and formless, and yet of such an evil potency that I have been transfixed with terror; there has ensued a mental conflict most horrible during which the unknown has exerted an awful magnetism urging me to submit my will entirely to its baleful ends. . . .

"I have found myself weakening, drawn upright in my bed, and then with a terrific effort I have at last overcome this dreadful hypnotism and sunk back exhausted and all of a sweat upon my pillow. . . . All this and more since that ill-omened thing has been in the house. Do you wonder, my friend, if I am a little—well, apprehensive?"

THIS EVIL THING

His earnestness was such that I could hardly doubt his veracity; it would be easy, I reflected, to imagine such things in a lonely place like this, with its macabre collection of archæological relics.

"Tell me," I said, "if you suspect some strange connection between these disturbing occurrences and this—this latest addition of yours, why don't you get rid of the evil thing?"

He stared at me, aghast.

"Get rid of it did you say? Get rid of it? Why, man, you don't understand—its priceless, its unique; it must be over three thousand years old! To get rid of it would be unforgivable. There are collectors who would give anything to get hold of such a prize."

I murmured under my breath that they would be welcome to it, for my part. My host continued.

"But there is something else about this mummy which makes it infinitely more interesting to me; still, to-morrow you shall see it for yourself."

With this doubtful pleasure awaiting me on the morrow, I went to bed, my host allotting me a bedroom next his own.

After breakfast next morning Roone led the way to the long, low-ceilinged room which was his museum. Here he had gathered over a period of years many curios of archæological value, rifled from ancient tombs, unearthed in excavations beneath the fierce sun of many a foreign land. Gold ornaments and trinkets; strange weapons with handles of yellow ivory; crude vases

and gourds; weird carvings in wood and stone.

As we went along my friend remarked on those objects which were new to the collection since my last visit; and now we came to the far end of the room, where a great curtain of black velvet hung in heavy folds from ceiling to floor. With a gesture he flung it back from the middle.

"And here we have the tomb of the unknown . . ." he announced.

It stood on end against the wall, a great wooden coffin elaborately carved and moulded to the shape of a human body. The lid had been removed and stood alongside; this, too, was engraved with weird figures and markings. But it was not the lid nor even the mummy itself that claimed my attention, but the head.

It lay at the foot of the mummy-case leering hideously into space. Certainly my host had not exaggerated in his description of the thing; never had I seen anything so abortively suggestive of evil; the stark, malignant expression of the face filled me with horror.

But what was this? I peered closer. Impossible, and yet. . . . I became aware that my host was watching me intently.

"Ah," he was saying, "so you—you've noticed it, then? You perceive the—shall I say—resemblance? It's unmistakable, is it not? Tell me now, don't you see a strange likeness between that gruesome face and my own features?"

I was silent; yet it was undeniable that there existed a certain unaccountable similarity of appearance.

"It's—it's most strange," I murmured, "a peculiar coincidence. . . ."

Then, in an effort to distract his attention, I ventured to remark on the unusual legibility of an inscription on the cover of the coffin.

"Oh yes," he said, "it's remarkably clear, but of such an ancient etymology that all my efforts at interpretation have come to nothing: it's very annoying. But perhaps you may be able to help on that point."

I observed that I should be glad to tackle the job, reflecting that at least it would be something for me to do. As we turned away I recalled my host's story of the animated head, and I was relieved when once more the velvet curtains were in place and we made our way out of the room, for I had no wish for a demonstration. Moreover, having now seen the detestable thing, I was quite ready to believe anything concerning it; even his account of the shadowy intruder in his bedroom was no longer incredible to me.

The rest of the day I spent in the well-stocked library poring over dusty tomes devoted to the study of ancient Egyptian etymology. But here I had no more success than my friend, and nightfall found me still without any solution to the mysterious inscription; nor could I, for that matter, trace any similar characters in any of the volumes which, so far, I had studied.

Not to be defeated, however, I continued my researches far into the night. My host, who had long been making half-hearted attempts to keep awake, presently arose, and bidding me an apologetic good night, retired to bed. I worked on, for now it seemed I had come upon a clue; slender though it was, I followed it up, only to find, an hour later, that once again I had drawn a blank.

THE SLEEP-WALKER'S DREAM

Eventually, with some disgust, I gave up the quest and made my way towards my bedroom. Reaching the foot of the stairs, I paused in-

voluntarily; there were footsteps on the floor above. With slow, measured tread they were approaching the stairway; soon they would be descending.

Quickly I took cover; but I need not have troubled. Michael Roone, for he it was, passed within a foot of me, arms outstretched, in his eyes the strange, fixed expression peculiar to somnambulists. Silently I shadowed him; across the hall he went, unfaltering: down the dark corridors he made his way straight for the antique-room.

At the door he paused, then swung it open and entered. After a momentary hesitation I, too, was within that room of vague distorted shadows. There he was, drawing back the great velvet curtains beyond which lay the thing of horror. Pale moonlight played weird tricks among the grotesque contents of the room; it cast a fantastic mosaic of light and shade upon the whole unforgettable tableau.

The sleep-walker knelt on the floor before the open coffin, his head drooped on his chest. Presently a low moan issued from his lips; then a great shuddering convulsion shook him from head to foot and he sprawled prostrate upon the ground.

For a moment he remained rigid, then, like one entranced, he rose slowly to his feet, his gaze fixed upon that monstrous head which now lay at his very feet leering hideously up at him. Now, his eyes still transfixed by the thing, he slowly backed away until he reached the door; then with a sudden quick movement he turned and made his way out into the corridor.

Overcoming with an effort my complete amazement, I at once made haste to resume my role of shadower and followed him; along the corridors he stalked, across the gloomy hall and up the stairs, and it was with infinite relief that I watched him at last re-enter his bedroom and silently close the door.

My host next morning was strangely morose and preoccupied; I refrained from remarking on the inexplicable events of the night before, but tentatively enquired if he had slept well. He roused himself with an effort.

"Last night," he said at length, "I had another of those dreams; this time of such an awful significance that I can no longer doubt the sinister conviction that has for a long time hung over me like a pall. It was a dream of extraordinary vividness—if it was a dream; it was more in the nature of some bizarre experience.

"Last night I travelled in spirit—how else can I explain it?—to some distant, unknown land; a land of great stone monoliths and burning sand. I was the central figure in a drama strange and terrible: a cameo from an existence of three thousand years ago.

"It was dusk and countless flares threw a fitful glow upon the whole incredible scene. Many people were gathered, dark-skinned and murmuring, before an ancient temple, decorated with carved monsters and hideous masks. I stood waiting: my crime I knew was great. Presently the murmuring grew in volume until at last they were clamouring and shouting—demanding my execution.

"I knelt before an altar: a great curved sword flashed downwards, and in a welter of blood my head rolled over in the sand. As from afar, now, I watched: the features blanched and set into an expression of intense malevolence—the self-same expression—the self-same head, I say, that even as I speak lies glaring at the foot of that accursed mummy-case!"

REINCARNATION

He broke off, trembling violently; yet his voice was calm.

"You see what it means, my friend: you comprehend; you are not forgetting the singular likeness between myself and that devilish head? It means only one thing, I say: it means that I am the living incarnation of that re-

pugnant thing downstairs. That you, with your boggling eyes, behold in me the reincarnation of some most evil being who died at least three thousand years ago."

I stared aghast, bewildered; yet I could not ignore the essence of probability in this amazing assertion; especially since I had been a silent witness of that fantastic ritual in the museum. I had heard of stranger things: moreover, such a theory could account for many of the mysterious mishaps which had lately befallen my unfortunate host. I could hardly doubt his sanity; much less his sincerity. There was little I could find to say.

"Well," I ventured at length, "what do you intend to do about it?"

"I wish I knew . . ." he said slowly: then after a pause: "One thing is certain: that I must get away from this place—for a while at least: my nerves, I fear, are giving way . . ."

That afternoon found me again in the library, more than ever determined to solve the mystery of that elusive inscription; again I followed my investigations far into the night.

Late in the morning of the following day my host, whom I had not seen since breakfast, burst into the library in a perfect frenzy of agitation.

"The head——" he jerked out, "it's gone—disappeared—vanished into thin air!"

Stupefied, I met his wild gaze.

"Gone?" I echoed vaguely. "Gone did you say?"

"Yes, man, yes—don't you understand? It's vanished."

Almost distracted he sank into a chair. After a while, in response to my earnest entreaties, he grew calmer. At least, I suggested, one might reasonably expect a little peace of mind now that the detestable thing was no longer in the house.

My words were strangely prophetic; in the days that followed nothing further of a mysterious nature happened in the house of Michael Roone. It was as though a great cloud had been lifted for ever; and there was quiet and peacefulness again.

Soon afterwards I returned home: but I thought it not altogether wise to inform my host that I had eventually arrived at an interpretation of the legend on the lid of that unholy mummy-case: it ran, if I remember rightly, after this fashion:

"Disturb not the tomb of Ekillon: for whosoever shall gaze for long upon the head of the evil one shall be visited with all manner of persecution and fear; neither shall there be peace nor rest in his house until once more this head is underground."

And as for the peculiar disappearance of the hideous thing, it remains to this day, for all I know, in the garden where I buried it that same night.

Hoodoo on the "Lady Grace"

The Way of Men in Ships

by FRANK BRONSTORPH

"ALL set, skipper?" asked the pilot, blithely.

"Except for yourself," growled the skipper, turning to watch operations on the foc's'le head. It was deserted, and Captain Bliss cursed under his breath. "What the hell's the matter, Mr. Brown?" he snapped.

"Man short, sir; the last man we signed on didn't like the smell of the ship and took French leave."

Captain Bliss snorted and spat disgustedly on to the pier-head. Two tugboats lay close by awaiting the hawser from the *Lady Grace*. A dozen men under the second mate were securing the hatch fastenings, and a couple of stokers off watch lounged on the rails and cast longing looks in the direction of Montreal. Simultaneously the sirens of the waiting tugs let out a bellow of impatience.

"We've got to get a man pronto, Mr. Brown," said the skipper. Mr. Brown understood that only too well; the ship was under-manned, anyhow.

"Now, where in the name of Hades does the Old Man expect me to find a hand?" Brown glanced angrily up and down the wharf side; some stray Lascar or ruffian was all he could expect. "Damn the Old Man and blast the *Lady Grace*."

"Man short, sir? I'd like the berth," came a quiet voice behind him. Brown turned swiftly. The speaker had a duffle-bag over his shoulder and a cloth cap on his head. His broad frame was covered by an old blue suit that was shiny and threadbare and seemed to have been slept in for years. His shoes —or the remains of them—were a mixture of patches and splices and cunning knots which only an old wind-bag sailor could have put together.

There was tribulation in his face, but a determined spark gleamed in his blue eyes under grey brows. Brown felt instinctively that the man who stood before him had known blue water and its dangers, and something of the sea's deep mystery clung to him; but

the man was old. Could he stand the gaff?

His cloth cap was off now; the hand touching his forelock trembled a little.

"Will you take me, sir?" he almost pleaded.

"What's your name?" Bliss barked from the bridge.

"Bill Evans, sir." The man spoke a little defiantly.

"What was your last ship?"

Bill Evans hesitated for a long moment. "The *Newsholm*, sir."

Captain Bliss whistled and the men working on the hatches stopped and regarded Bill with interest. A murmur rose from them.

"But the *Newsholm* was lost with all hands six months ago," said the skipper.

Old Bill threw back his head and seemed to grow younger and broader and more mysterious.

"I was the only man saved, sir." It came out softly, like the whisper of ripples against the ship's side.

Captain Bliss regarded him with new interest.

"Sign him on, Mr. Brown," he said curtly.

"Old Bill's got a hoodoo, skipper," yelled one of the men working on the hatches.

"He don't go wid us."

A roar of approval went up from the crowd.

"I don't sail wid dat guy," shouted Adal the Finn, making a dash for the Jacob's ladder. Mr. Brown thrust out a foot and tripped him up. Adal rolled over into the scuppers, struck his head and lay still.

"Quartermaster, haul up that ladder," roared the skipper. The quartermaster and two hands jumped to obey. As he glanced down at the sullen faces below him, the skipper's anger rose. This hoodoo business was all stuff and nonsense, the gossip of saloons when the whisky went in and the sense went out. Every man had a right to earn a living, and salt water had a way of washing off bad luck, if there was such a thing. His foghorn voice drowned the growls below.

"Sign him on, Mr. Brown," he repeated, "and if I hear any more of this damned hoodoo business on this ship, I'll put the whole lot of you in irons. Blast me if I don't."

THE JINX

The *Lady Grace* was making her twelve knots with the current. Overhead the stars shone brilliantly; near the riverbank wisps of mist lurked on the flats. Old Bill found an empty bunk in the fo'c'sle and crept in. The rhythmic motion of the ship lulled his senses. He slept.

A deep, despairing cry rang through the fo'c'sle. There was a hoarse chorus of complaint from tired bodies. The cry rang out again, louder, piercingly, grew into a thin shriek like the wail of a lost soul. It seemed to come directly from below Old Bill's bunk. Leaning over, Old Bill looked down into two great luminous eyes, and again the eerie cry rang through the fo'c'sle.

A volley of oaths and missiles poured out of the bunks. The cat shed the missiles as a duck sheds rain-drops, howled again, dismally, ominously, and walked out.

"Vat did I tell you boys?" Adal yelled triumphantly. "Dat Jinx come to look for Bill."

"Begorra, it was a damned banshee," quavered Dublin, the Irishman.

"It was a cat, and cats is good," Hans purred in the darkness.

"Black cats for luck, but ginger cats is hell," a Yankee voice commented.

The men jabbered together excitedly, till a stentorian voice called the watch below on deck.

On the fo'c'sle head, Old Bill saw the lights of a large town on the port bow and beyond them the starboard light of

a ship moved southwards into the main stream.

"Bridge ahoy," Old Bill hailed. "Ship on the port bow."

"Aye, aye," came the helmsman's reply.

There was time enough and room enough to clear her, and already the *Lady Grace* began to turn to starboard. Suddenly the turning motion stopped. For a long minute she held on her course, and then, as if gathering herself for a leap, hurled herself straight at the ship abeam.

Old Bill realised with dismay that the steering gear had stuck. Aghast he clutched the rail and watched fascinated. Behind him came the sound of the engine-room telegraph jangling furiously. The siren roared a hoarse warning and the *Lady Grace* quivered from stem to stern as the screws raced backward. The watch below tumbled on deck and huddled together half dazed around the foremast. A babble of excited voices rent the air.

The space between the ships grew rapidly smaller. To Old Bill it seemed that a collision was inevitable, and that he had merely escaped drowning on the *Newsholm* to be crushed to death on the *Lady Grace*. Perhaps after all, Adal was right, and there was a damned hoodoo on him, determined to work its worst.

The seconds dragged by like æons. The ships seemed to touch. Old Bill held his breath waiting for that sickening jar. It did not come: the ship abeam had evaded the prow of the *Lady Grace* by a few scant inches. A volley of stirring salt oaths roared out from the other vessel.

Adal's high-pitched voice broke the silence of the *Lady Grace*. "De damned jinx is goin' to get us, boys."

"Maybe, blimeby in the sea it go away," Hans's voice trembled.

"It will go away wid us to Davy Jones locker, begorra," roared Dublin.

"Hell," said Yank. "Wasn't I a sucker to sail on this ship?"

THE FIRE

Muffled to his ears, Bliss paced the bridge, and sniffed the weather. In the twilight the bleak coast of Labrador loomed rugged and inhospitable as the *Lady Grace* headed towards the straits of Belle Isle. The current from the straits had already reduced the ship's speed a couple of knots and was driving against them harder than ever. Bliss roared down the speaking-tube to the engine-room.

McGregor, the chief engineer, answered in person.

"I am giving you all I can, skipper, but the blasted mine sweepings the owners filled the bunkers with won't steam——"

The grumbling voice died out suddenly. Bliss roared into the speaking-tube again. There was no reply, and above the hum of the machinery there came to him an ominous sound.

"McGregor, McGregor, are you there?" he shouted.

There was no reply; the revolutions of the engine began to fall off, the ship was stopping. Suddenly, out of the ventilators behind the bridge, dense clouds of black smoke poured, and Bliss realised that the stokehold was on fire. Like a flash his right hand seized the lanyard of the siren and its hoarse note of alarm brought all hands on deck.

"Get a line of hose down the engine-room pronto, Mr. Brown," the skipper roared. Already Old Bill was uncoiling the hose. Willing hands went to his assistance. The engines had stopped and the ship was no longer under way. Smoke from the ventilators poured into the faces of the men, made their eyes

smart and their lungs protest in spluttering coughs.

To Bliss, the men struggling in the smoke-murk below, seemed like so many spirits from the nether regions busy with incantations, and the words "Old Bill's got a hoodoo, skipper," came back to him with cumulative force. Perhaps if he hadn't been so pig-headed about Old Bill——

The hose filled out with the pressure of the water inside as the hydrant was turned on. Slowly, very slowly the black smoke ceased, and out of the stokehold came a grimy company of men, choking, gasping, to fill their lungs with life-giving air. They cast dark looks at Old Bill. It was his dastardly work. The damned hoodoo that had wrecked the *Newsholm* had followed him here, bent on their own destruction.

"What the hell were you doing below, Mac?" the skipper asked.

"A heap of rubbish in the stokehold which the damned trimmers were too lazy to throw overboard caught fire," McGregor replied, turning and making his way towards the engine-room. "They won't do it again," he continued grimly as he disappeared down a companionway.

Old Bill, standing in the shelter of a ventilator, watched the deck hands move towards the fo'c'sle. Dublin, passing by, greeted him caustically.

"Hide, ye spalpeen, hide, but Auld Nick will come by his own yet."

THE DERELICT

Peering through the murk of the night at a faint star high over the horizon, Captain Bliss heaved a sigh of content. The ship was clear of the straits of Belle Isle at last, and blue water lay ahead. He turned into the chart-room and examined the course he had set. Satisfied, he went out and had a squint at the compass. The ship was well on her course.

The man at the wheel held it in a peculiar way, the way the old wind-bag sailors steered when they expected the ship to buck and the helm to kick. Captain Bliss recognised Old Bill.

"I hope your hoodoo is gone back to land, Evans," he said quietly.

"There ain't no sich animal, sir," Old Bill said stoutly, and the skipper smiled. The *Lady Grace* rolled over to starboard; Old Bill gave her a spoke and brought her back to the course. Bliss nodded and turned away.

The door of the chart-room opened and Sparks came out with a paper in his hands.

"Derelict reported, skipper," he said.

Bliss felt an icy chill run down his spine. They went into the chart-room together, and he read the message reporting a derelict north of Belle Isle straits and advising all ships using the passage to proceed with caution. He checked the ship's latitude and longitude on the chart and marked with an X the reported position of the derelict. There was plenty of room between it and the ship's course, even allowing for the current, which was making a couple of knots in a southerly direction.

Satisfied, he was about to get out of his chair when he noticed that the derelict had been first reported at eight a.m. It was now past midnight. The derelict was much closer than he had thought.

With a leap Bliss was out of the chart-room and rang the engine-room telegraph to "slow."

"Hard to starboard," he barked at Old Bill.

"Aye, aye, sir." The wheel went hard over and the *Lady Grace* turned effortlessly out of her course like a giant whale avoiding the frenzied rush of an

adversary. In his heart Old Bill rejoiced. The Old Man was smart; the derelict wasn't going to catch him.

"Keep her south, dead south," Bliss ordered.

"Aye, aye, sir."

Bliss walked over to the engine-room telegraph and his hand reached out for the lever to call for more speed. He never moved it. The *Lady Grace* staggered as a boxer staggers from the impact of a devastating blow, and a sickening shudder ran through her from stem to stern. Then she swung violently round to port, shook herself wearily, wallowed and rode free. She had struck the derelict.

Bliss stared into space, every sense numb. After an agony of waiting, McGregor's voice seemed to come from an infinity of distance.

"What's the damage, Mac?" he asked, scarcely breathing.

"Port propeller carried away, and may be a plate or two dented."

"What can you do about it?"

"We have a spare propeller on deck, but we can't change it here."

"What speed can you make now?"

"About seven knots."

"Very good. We'll make for St. John's, Nova Scotia, and put on the spare."

Bliss walked into the chart-room with a melancholy air and set the course for St. John's. Brown peered over his shoulder as he pricked the chart.

"There is a damned hoodoo on this ship," Brown muttered under his breath.

"You are a damned fool," Bliss roared, letting the dividers fall on the chart.

"All I've heard from yourself and the damned trash in the fo'c'sle since the voyage began is hoodoo, hoodoo, hoodoo. You have plastered the sea and the sky with hoodoo. You eat and drink hoodoo; you go to bed with it at night and drag it out bright and fresh in the morning and parade it on deck. Blast me if you are not all fit for a lunatic asylum." His face grew red and the great veins at the sides of his neck swelled in anger. "Get out and give the helmsman the course," he flung finally at Brown.

Brown hung his head and went out. Bliss turned back to his chart, and Brown watched the helmsman bring the *Lady Grace* round to the new course. Bliss was talking to himself, still in anger.

"The damned land-lubbers and barnacles, to broadcast the wrong position of a derelict to sink my ship and ruin me. *That's* your damned hoodoo, Mr. Brown——"

MUTINY

The propeller had been changed at last, and below the engineers were putting on the finishing touches. Bliss walked the bridge deck impatiently, like a caged lion. Beyond the entrance to Harbour Grace, he could see the high combers, and above them flying clouds, surging like charging horses across the sky.

There was a north-east gale making up outside. He reached for the speaking-tube, and for the tenth time that morning called his chief engineer.

"All set now, Mac?" he asked.

"Not quite, skipper; in another hour perhaps."

A man came out of the fo'c'sle hurriedly and looked apprehensively around. The skipper recognised Old Bill. Next moment Old Bill was scuttling aft and the fo'c'sle erupted in a spate of angry seamen behind him, Dublin in the lead.

"What the hell do you mean by this?" Bliss roared.

The crew came to a halt near the companionway to the deck.

"If Old Bill don't quit this ship now, sor, we quit," Dublin shouted. His blue eyes blazed and his red hair falling over his forehead gave him a wild and sinister appearance. "We can't stand this hoodoo any more, sor." Dublin's voice was desperate.

So the hoodoo was at work again. Bliss waited.

"Every night we hear them in the fo'c'sle—Williams an' Murphy an' Dago Joe that drowned in the *Newsholm* a-calling to Old Bill—all night, calling an' calling an' callin'. Old Bill can go wid them, sir, but we ain't."

"You are a damned pack of liars," Bliss roared. "Get back forrard and don't let me hear any more of this nonsense."

"You are a damned pig-headed jackass," Dublin retorted. "You an' Old Bill can go to hell together, but we ain't." He turned to the crowd. "Come on, mates, get your dunnage. Goin' ashore we be."

They swarmed down into the fo'c'sle and were soon back with their belongings. Argument was useless. An insensate fear clutched at their hearts, lent speed to their actions. Bliss stepped into his quarters for his automatic.

A swift rush carried the men up the companionway, along the main deck and up to the boat deck. Eager hands were stripping the canvas covers from one of the life-boats, loosing the falls and swinging the life-boat out.

"Avast there," Bliss roared again, pistol in hand, a grim look on his weather-beaten face.

"Don't listen to his braying, mates," Dublin shouted. "Let's get away."

Bliss raised his pistol and fired over the heads of the men clustered around the boat. The shot whined viciously overhead and the men hesitated, but Dublin egged them on.

"Better get shot than fight the damned hoodoo, mates. Get busy."

The men hung back. Dublin swung himself into the boat and worked swiftly at the remainder of the canvas covering. Bliss's pistol spat again. The bullet struck the rope of the forward tackle. The boat rocked slightly. Suddenly the rope parted and the forward end of the life-boat pitched seawards, catapulting Dublin into the water.

Struggling and spluttering, he struck out with difficulty. Old Bill heaved a life-belt adroitly over his shoulders. Then the after tackle parted, the life-boat dropped with a crash into the sea and floated bottom upwards.

A howl of despair went up from the men. Baffled and beaten, they stood listlessly watching Dublin and the boat drift away.

"Get forrard," Bliss roared, raising his pistol again. For a second they hesitated, then with one accord they began to shuffle back the way they had come, swearing obscenely.

STORM AND FOG

The *Lady Grace* was out in the open sea again. The life-boat, properly secured, swung at its davits; Dublin lay in the brig, groaning in irons.

The fo'c'sle was as cheerful as a tomb. The men spoke in surly whispers, cursing Old Bill and the skipper. Outside, the wind was rising, the ship pitched and tossed, buffeting the seas, complaining in every rivet and joint. Old Bill rested quietly in his bunk, his senses alert, listening intently to the raging waters and the sullen talk of the men, which reached him fitfully be-

tween the shrieking gusts of the wind.

Suddenly the electric light went out and a heaving, tumbling blackness filled the fo'c'sle.

"Yes, give him the works and finish the damned hoodoo for keeps." The words came distinctly to Old Bill. He acted quickly, switching his head to where his feet had been and drawing up his feet as far as possible.

A heavy object crashed down on the bunk. Old Bill made no sound, but slowly stretching out his hand he grasped the object. It was a short bar of iron, which would certainly have cracked his skull if it had landed. An excited whispering broke out in the concealing darkness. The sounds of movement drew close. Someone was leaning over his bunk. He threw himself together and lunged forward the bar of iron in his right hand.

He felt the jar of its connection with a human body and a shriek of agony rose above the howling of the wind and the complaining of the ship. Swiftly Old Bill charged into Dublin's bunk aft of his own.

Morning found the *Lady Grace* still buffeted by mountainous seas. There was no wind and the sky was dark and ominous. Leaning over the port rail Old Bill sniffed the weather. Wild it was, and foreboding, and a still small voice kept saying to him: "Keep a sound eye to windward, beware Cape Stiff weather." But Cape Stiff lay several thousand miles to the south.

At noon the sun came out, and the sea moderated. It grew almost calm, save for the long rolling swells, and the *Lady Grace* ploughed steadily on. A long-winged sea bird hove in sight. "Albatross," thought Old Bill, and the familiar scenes of the Southern Ocean rose before him again; but it was only a lonely gannet flying sluggishly westward. Old Bill shook his head dejectedly, grew restless and moody, and began to tramp the deck, casting anxious and hurried glances at the ocean. The men eyed him queerly, tapped their heads significantly and sniggered; the hoodoo had got him at last.

Suddenly a dark fog-bank swept out of the sea like the creation of some malevolent spirit, and wrapped its swiftly billowing folds around the *Lady Grace*. From the bridge everything was blotted out except the vague outline of the bridge itself, across which Captain Bliss paced restively, his keen gaze seeking to pierce the obscuring mist. He rang the engine-room telegraph to half-speed while the foghorn roared raucously.

"What do you make of it, Mr. Brown?" he asked.

"Never seen anything so sudden and so thick, sir."

Bliss nodded moodily and continued his pacing. The startling descent of the fog-bank was certainly disconcerting. Hard on the port bow a fog-horn bellowed and the *Lady Grace* flung back the challenge. Bliss dashed to the engine-room telegraph and rang for full speed astern. The ship quivered as the screws reversed. Seizing the port rails of the bridge he peered anxiously out at the billowing vapour.

"Damn the fog," he growled despairingly.

A huge, swiftly moving object loomed suddenly out of the fog and dashed madly past within a biscuit toss of the Captain. Bliss wiped the perspiration from his forehead with an unsteady hand. A full minute went by before he moved the handle of the engine-room telegraph to ahead.

Huddled together abaft the fo'c'sle deck the men groaned and Adal's high-pitched voice quavered abjectly.

"Dis is de end now. Jinx is goin' to make an end of everybody." He hung limply on to a ventilator, and the fog threw back his sobs in a mocking monotone.

THE ICEBERG

The *Lady Grace* went on slowly, uncertainly, foghorn roaring. The men shifted uneasily along the rails, squinting at the fog as if preparing to leap into it. Old Bill stood apart, head up, breathing in the fog as a stag sniffs the wind when instinct warns him of the presence of the hunter. There was in the air a faint, vaguely familiar smell that filled him with uneasiness. He had smelt it before, but where, where? He went quickly down the lanes of his memory, searching for the land-mark that would give him the answer.

The smell grew stronger. He walked across the deck and inhaled deeply. It was a smell of frozen air and earth, that sent a tingle along the base of his scalp and a queer feeling into the pit of his stomach. He peered frantically over the rail; there was nothing to be seen but the grey fog, billowing in eerie folds around the ship.

But there was no mistaking the smell now. It filled his lungs and whispered into his soul the dangers that lay ahead of them.

"Bridge ahoy," Old Bill roared. "Iceberg ahead."

"Where away?" Bliss asked.

"On the port bow, sir."

The engine-room telegraph jangled and the *Lady Grace* came to a stop. A light north wind rippled the surface of the sea, whipping away the upper strata of fog.

Dead ahead, a scant cable's length away, a huge iceberg lay silently upon the ocean. The setting sun tipped its upper ridges in orange and gold. Above the water-line the whole mass gleamed like the fangs of a hungry wolf. The men looked incredulously at the berg and wonderingly at Old Bill.

"Ach, we was all wrong." Hans's voice answered their thoughts. "Old Bill is one damned good -sailor-man Dere ain't no hoodoo on him."

"You said it, buddy." Yank's matter-of-fact voice was cheering.

The men clustered around Old Bill, chaffing him playfully, slapping him on the back.

The *Lady Grace* circled the berg swiftly to the south. The seas danced merrily ahead in the last rays of the sunlight, which seemed to flood the ship with warmth and friendliness.

"A tot of grog for all hands, bosun," ordered Captain Bliss.

"Aye, aye, sir."

"Aye, aye," roared the men in unison; and Old Bill felt that it was good to be alive and homeward bound once more with a friendly crowd of sailormen.

Far Too Conventional

The Stranger Dares the Haunted House

by FRANK CLEMENTS

THE stranger laughed. "I suppose you are all trying to pull my leg," he said.

"You can think that if you like, sir," muttered the landlord, and the others in the bar murmured assent.

"But really the whole thing is so . . . so conventional. It's a stock property story: a house that has been empty for years, sudden deaths, some local legend, and then a mysterious creature whose touch is fatal. Come on, now. You ought to be able to invent a better ghost than that. It's hopelessly old-fashioned."

"So are ghosts," remarked the old gentleman, who, till then, had taken no part in the conversation.

The stranger turned. "Do you really believe this as well, sir?" he asked, a slightly mocking glint in his eyes.

"I don't disbelieve it, just because it has all the conventional ingredients of a ghost story. After all, how did such things become conventional?"

"Because they are so obviously frightening, I suppose."

"Rather because they are the circumstances in which ghosts have always been seen. The description of a man dying with a bullet in his brain would be conventional, wouldn't it? Because men shot in the head die quite conventionally. In the same way, ghosts generally appear in the same surroundings."

"But have there really been deaths in that old house?"

"Since I retired and settled here—twenty years ago—there have been two. Tramps, both of them. It was a long time before their bodies were discovered, and no longer possible to state the exact cause of death."

"A long time before their bodies were discovered?"

"No one in the village visits the house. It was the dogs which drew attention to them."

"That's right," interrupted the landlord. "And there may be a corpse there, for all we know. No one wants to look."

Involuntarily, the stranger shuddered:

"Brr, what a horrible idea!"

"It's a horrible house," sighed the old gentleman.

The stranger drained his glass and nodded to the landlord as a sign that he should take the company's orders.

"Well, what's the ghost supposed to be like? Rattling bones and all that?"

The gentleman shook his head gravely. "No one has described it, for the simple reason that the only two who may have seen it recently—the tramps—both died."

"Isn't there some sort of traditional description?"

"As the landlord said, there is the old legend of some . . . hairy bestial presence."

"Just as I thought—so vague that it's obviously imagined."

Again the old gentleman disagreed:

"On the contrary, when people imagine things, they usually invent detailed descriptions."

The stranger pursed his lips and shrugged:

"All the same, I'm afraid it all seems ridiculous."

"Would you like to go there, sir?" asked the landlord jokingly, as he placed full glasses on the table before them.

The stranger looked round the bar with its taciturn country occupants, while his lips curled with the townsman's contempt for the yokel:

"Yes, I would. I'll go now, if there's one of you not afraid to show me the way."

The old gentleman raised his hand:

"Now, please, don't do anything foolish."

"I'm not foolish," declared the stranger, a little flushed with the unusually strong beer, and conscious that he was the centre of attraction. "But all this talk is. Who's going to show me the way?"

There was silence in the bar.

He laughed again, this time unpleasantly and with a jeering joke:

"Well, they say some things about you country bumpkins in town, but this is the limit. I'll have a fine story to tell when I get back."

At this there was a mutter, and a scowling young labourer stepped forward.

"All right, mister. If you wants to be smart, I'll show 'ee the way."

"Brave fellow," sneered the stranger, rising from the table. "We won't waste any time. I'll stay till twelve—that's the fatal hour, isn't it? I'd spend the night, there, only I must be moving on to-morrow and want a good sleep."

He buttoned on his coat and drew a flask from his pocket.

"Fill this up, please, landlord. It'll be cold there, I expect."

"Aye, very cold," confirmed a voice.

The old gentleman protested once more:

"If nothing happens while you're there, it also proves nothing. These stories are not made or unmade in one night. Whereas if . . ."

"There you are, sir," chuckled the stranger. "'If nothing happens.' You know that nothing will."

He took the flask from the landlord:

"Do you want me to pay the reckoning before I go?" he asked tauntingly.

The landlord hesitated a moment, and then replied:

"I do, sir."

His face was grim and unsmiling, so that the stranger felt vaguely disturbed in spite of himself. But he drew out a note and slapped it on to the counter:

"Good, leave the change. I'll be back for it."

ON HIS WAY

With a challenging glance around him, he followed the labourer outside. The old gentleman rose and hurried after them.

"So you insist on going? Very well, you know what I think. We pass my cottage on your way. I'll give you a lantern."

"Thank you, sir," said the stranger, genuinely grateful, for the evening air had already chilled some of his zest.

"And I'd like you to take my dog. He'll be company for you, and not only that, animals have a very keen sense of the supernatural. Watch him closely. If he shows any alarm, leave the house at once. You'll promise me that?"

The stranger promised while the labourer grunted. They waited outside the cottage, which was on the fringe of the village, while the old gentleman went inside.

"Why don't you come with me?" asked the stranger. "You'd have a fine laugh over the others afterwards."

"Not me," refused the labourer shortly, and turned away.

After a few minutes, the old gentleman returned with an old lantern and a shaggy Airedale, who sniffed at the stranger with friendly curiosity.

"His name's Robber," said the old gentleman. "Don't forget what you promised me."

When they reached the entrance to the short gravel drive that led between two rows of elms to the house, the labourer halted.

"This is as far as I come. Please yourself what you do."

With a wave of his hand, the stranger walked briskly up the drive. Standing beneath the porch, he hesitated before he pushed open the door. The village seemed far away, for its lights were hidden by the trees, and he felt very lonely.

At that moment it would have been very easy to retrace his steps, but the thought of the grins on the broad country faces restrained him. Then the dog pushed his wet nose gently against his hand, as if the beast also cherished the awareness of another living presence.

The touch gave him confidence and he fondled the dog's ear, before, with an unconsciously defiant swagger, he flung open the door. Little was revealed by the faint rays of the lantern.

He suddenly remembered the landlord's words:

"And there may be a corpse there now, for all we know."

"Indeed, there might be anything outside the small circle of life within the glimmering light cast by the lamp on to the dusty floor and murky walls of an abandoned corridor. The dog yawned with a forced creaking sound which set his skin tingling, so that he muttered anxiously:

"Quiet Robber, quiet!"

He left the front door wide open behind him. In three paces he could be outside in the open air, so different from the musty chill in the house. Immediately on his left, there was a room. He entered, leaving this door also open.

Some while passed before he made any effort to explore the room, but as his imagination set to work, the need to do so in order to quieten his nerves overcame his repugnance. He moved slowly, holding the lantern first high above his head and then close to the floor before he shifted position.

In circling the room he encountered no obstacles or furniture. He sat on the window seat. Outside the trees hovered in the gloom, but there came no sound of their rustling.

CROUCHING MONSTER

He strove in vain to control his thoughts, to direct them to calm or amusing matters. But whenever he recalled any humorous story, it would fade unwittingly from his mind, and some horrible one would come forward persistently to demand his attention. One story grew particularly vivid in his fancy. It told of a crouching monster

with yellow eyes, which sprang upon its victims through closed windows.

Looking nervously over his shoulder, he saw the branches of the trees swaying as with a life of their own, and they took on threatening shapes as he watched them. Soon, the influence of the story became so strong that he was afraid to look through the window, yet also terrified to turn his back on it, for fear of what might approach from behind. He sat awkwardly in profile, till the strained position drove him to leap up suddenly and rush across the room.

Here, he could hear the rustling of the trees, and that fixed his attention while his ears strained for any break in the normal rhythm of sound. He heard the deep breathing of the dog, who had fallen asleep, his nose buried between his paws. A sharp pressure on his hip recalled the presence of the flask. Gratefully, he withdrew it from his pocket.

The whisky brought him confidence and his old bravado. The dog slept so peacefully and unalarmed that he resolved to explore the house. He did not take the lantern with him. Ever since his childhood he had trained himself to see in the dark, also his fear of the dark had been lessened if he had a lit room to make for; that had always been of more importance than carrying a light himself.

His stumbles were frequent, mainly because his mood led him to advance with a deliberately blundering recklessness, for the sounds of his own progress reassured his latently tense nerves. He came upon nothing of interest, and was about to return to the room below, when he heard rapid pattering footsteps along the corridor. Obviously, the noise had disturbed the dog.

He whispered: "Robber, Robber!" and the gentle patter approached to his side. It was too dark for him to make out the Airedale's form, but he stroked the beast, whose ragged coat was quite dank, revealing to him how unhealthy was the atmosphere of the house. He felt sorry for Robber and caressed him soothingly.

Although it was not yet twelve, he resolved to put an end to the nonsense and return to the inn. He heard the scratching and pattering follow him downstairs; the animal was faithfully at his heels, giving warmth and comfort by his presence.

But when he reached the room, he halted, and his mouth opened for the cry he could not utter. It was as if his heart stopped with the sudden shock, and his body tingled with horror. There, in the light of the lantern, still sleeping soundly, lay the dog. . . .

Honest John

What the Lightning Suggested and the Dawn Revealed

by J. MOFFAT

JOHN NISBET founded the Nisbet Mills, at Milton, under the name of John Nisbet & Son, in 1787. He determined to be honest in all his dealings, and he kept his word. He certainly found that the proverb, "Honesty is the best policy," was a true one, for though he started with a small capital he died in 1812, at the age of sixty, a rich man, and the owner of a small estate outside the town where he bad first seen the light of day in a cottage.

A year or two before his death he built a mausoleum, and there he was laid to rest. His wife followed him two years later.

He was a keen business man, a hard man, perhaps, but an honest man, and such was his reputation that for years before his death even the "bucks" of that day spoke of him with respect as "Honest John." But human nature can never be perfect, and the "Adam" in Nisbet showed itself in his conceit in his honesty. He delighted in his soubriquet, and as he lay dying he grasped his only son by the arm in a vice-like grip, and said to him in a voice hoarsened by approaching death:

"If ye do not deal honestly with men as I have done, I shall seek your answer from my grave."

Now this son William, so tradition has it, did not deal honestly with his brother men, nor with his patrimony. He ill-treated and under-paid his workpeople. His mother's death so soon after that of her husband was said to be a result of his behaviour. Moreover, he mortgaged the estate to a moneylender, and he narrowly escaped the gallows for forgery.

One morning after a night of thunder and lightning, he was found dead just outside the burial-place of his father, and local gossip, embittered by a scoundrel's treatment, did not require the tinker's story of having seen "Honest John" walking that wild night, to state emphatically that William Nisbet had been made to answer his father for his misdeeds.

His son John Nisbet succeeded him. He might have been nicknamed "Prudent John," but he gained no such distinction. He was honest to all men. He set himself to undo the harm his father had done, and he succeeded. The estate was freed from debt. The mills prospered, and his aid was sought by the two political parties of the country.

He was, however, a reserved man, and did not seek the publicity of politics. His ways were simple, but the neighbours were surprised one morning to learn that he had married his housekeeper. He was old when he married,

but, like a certain patriarch, he was given a son in his old age. This son he named William Nisbet, and William Nisbet succeeded his father in his early twenties.

William had quite a lot of his great-grandfather in him. He was, however, ambitious. He loved money. He loved power. He invested judicially, became a director of many firms and a leading financier. Eventually, he became Sir William Nisbet and married a peer's daughter.

And so we find him, a widower, aged fifty-six, childless, sitting after dinner in a smoking-room of the new mansion he had built on his great-grandfather's estate, on an August night about 11.30, the servants in their quarters, having been dismissed for the night—a lonely man.

There were heavy lines beneath Sir William's eyes, and a troubled look on his face, as he stared out across the fields that were his, lying white in the moonlight. Several times he clenched his hands, and sat alert in his chair, as if some sudden thought had opened a golden pathway leading away from his troubles. But his hands suddenly unclenched, and back he sank into his chair.

The crash was coming. He knew that. So did his friends. That was why he was alone in his mansion house. He smiled bitterly to himself when he thought of his friends, recalling the many words of flattery, the many house-parties he had given, the many he had attended, the many loans he had made, the valuable advice he had given.

He recalled his treatment at the hands of his friends these last months. There were the Castley brothers. He had helped them to wealth and a title for the elder brother. There was Lord Levald, whose estate he had saved from going into the market. There was Reubens, whose crazy schemes he had turned into money-making ones. Where were they now in his hour of need?

He laughed, and started at the sound of his laughter. It seemed to echo in the quiet room. He sprang up from his chair and hastily poured himself a glass of port, which he hurriedly drank, and then he sat down again, but he put the decanter within easy reach, and a minute or two later he gulped down another glass of port, and then another. In a short time he told himself that he was better. He was thinking more clearly, and the curious feeling in his temples was passing.

He would not give in. No, he was "Honest John's" great-grandson, "Honest John," the old fighter who had founded the family fortunes. No, he would find a way out, an honest one, surely, but a way out—he must find a way out.

THE FLASH OF AN IDEA

He opened the windows just a little, for the room had become very warm. He noticed that the clouds had rolled up and obscured the moon, and that rain was falling, while in the distance there was a faint rumbling.

He paused in the act of lighting a cigar, a brand that Joyce had introduced to him. Curse Joyce, but for him and his infernal swindle he (Sir William) would that night have been as he was these long years, respected, trusted, wealthy.

The cigar remained unlighted. Sir William's eyes narrowed and his hands clenched once more. He stepped back from the windows hurriedly as the lightning flashed across the sky as quick as a certain thought flashed across his brain.

The mills! Why had he not thought of the mills and their heavy insurance? He was glad he had kept them to himself, having refused all offers to turn them into a company. He had often been tempted, but he had felt bound to keep them in the family out of respect to his great-grandfather and his father. Now they must go. He had no heir.

The insurance money would give him that financial backing he so desperately required.

It would be easy, too. He would take the short cut across the fields to the outskirts of the town where the mills stood. The watchman would have retired after his midnight tour of inspection. A few tins of petrol and the whole place would be ablaze, and the fire could be attributed to the storm. It was so simple.

He looked at his keys, and ran his fingers down one. It was the key that admitted him to the newer portion of the building, where there was so much woodwork. Sir William smiled. He was saved.

His workpeople? The thought crossed his mind. What would they do? He would not rebuild—for a long time at least. He helped himself again to port. "A man's first duty is to himself," he muttered thickly, as he laid down the glass.

A water-proof over his dinner-suit and a cap pulled down over his eyes, he quietly let himself out of his house, as quietly as if he were a thief. He walked along the grass on his tiptoes, avoiding the gravel path, but stopped in his step as a brilliant flash of lightning lit up the landscape. He looked around for a minute or two, listening intently, but there was no sound, and then came the crash of thunder.

"I must hurry," he muttered, and he left the drive with its dark trees, and clumsily got over a wire fence. The storm was now at its height, and flash succeeded flash, while the night moaned.

He started to walk quickly across the field, and then he broke into a half-run, as a feeling that he was being pursued seized hold of him. He stopped once and tried to shake it off, but the blue forked tongue that split the sky unnerved him, and he sprang off again, his breath coming in heavy gasps.

"I must get it done quickly," he told himself, "very quickly."

Then a slip on the wet grass and down he crashed, all the breath knocked out of his body. For a minute or two he was dazed, but the lash of rain on his upturned face revived him, and he scrambled to his feet, and without taking note of his direction, so far as that was possible, he set off again. But this time the throbbing in his temples which had troubled him these last days returned more violently than ever.

Flash, and flicker and crash, and he was running—no, walking, no, running—making for somewhere. Ah, he was to fire the mills for money. Then he must get out of this dark field. He had no idea that this field was so large. He stopped suddenly. Where was he going? He asked himself again. Anywhere out of this accursed field. But this would never do. He was running blindly, and who or what was behind him, and who called his name?

He was a fool. He had a job to do. The mills must be fired. Would his heart never stop that awful beating? He was being hunted. It was foolishness. It could not be. He had done nothing—yet. Nobody knew. The mills——

Flash, flicker and crash. Then the dark mass of masonry loomed out of the intermittent darkness on his right. He must get to the safety of one of the mill buildings for a minute or two to rest, and then the mills and money. Another twenty yards——

Flash and crash and blackness.

* * * * *

In the morning they found him lying beside the lightning-shattered mausoleum of his father. "Honest John's" coffin had been violently thrown from where it had so long rested. The old wood had given way, and one skeleton arm was lying, strangely enough, across the dead Sir William's body.

The Ghost House

To Which the Haunting Form Returned

by MAJOR B. WILMOT ALLISTONE

TO Mary the house was an obsession.

At night she dreamed of it—dreamed that she wandered on the close-clipped lawn that ran down from it to the tranquil lily pond where moorhens floated among the white blooms, preening their feathers and sending occasional ripples across the still surface as they dived beneath it—dreamed that she walked down the strip of crazy paving, where moss grew in the cranks of the stones, between the herbaceous beds of blue and white larkspur, lupin, hollyhock, peony and the thousand perennials whose bright colours blazed in the sunshine.

She dreamed that she stood on the grassy edge of the pond, watching the silvery streaks as the little fish darted hither and thither over the sandy bottom, and felt the soft turf beneath her feet. She turned and looked at the Tudor house with its dull red bricks peeping here and there from the climbing clematis, the dormer windows and squat chimneys with their wisps of bluish smoke rising lazily in the still air.

She dreamed that she walked through the French windows into the lounge, with its chintz-covered chairs and Chesterfield, water-colour paintings, rosewood tables and casement-curtained leaded lights, into the dining-room with its low oak-beamed ceiling and artist's proof hunting scenes upon the walls, up the narrow oak staircase to the rooms above.

To Mary it was no dream, but a vivid, happy reality, and always, when she awoke, she turned to Jim with a smile of contented peace. Jim yawned and ran his fingers through the dark-brown curls that covered the little head on the pillow beside him.

He knew the cause of his wife's waking smile. He had listened so often to the story of her night journeys and her longing for the old house that he had never seen, but knew, as well as she, from her description.

"Been dreaming again, my sweet," said he, "tell me what you did this time."

"The same as always, Jim," she answered, linking her hands behind her head and fixing dreamy eyes upon the

ceiling. "I start at the pond, watching the birds, the fish and the lilies; gaze at the old red walls, the creeper and the gabled roof; walk across the lawn into the house by the French windows; climb the old oak stairs and every minute of it is happy. I know every inch of that house and love it. I know every corner of the garden and, in my dream, can smell the flowers. That is strange, isn't it, that one can smell in a dream?"

"Very strange, my babe. It all sounds rum to me. You only saw it once, and you didn't go inside, and yet you know the garden and the house as well as if you lived there. But perhaps it is not really as you see it inside, I expect that part is just the dream."

Jim knew what the dream meant to her. He knew that it made her happy and helped her through the struggle of poverty while he strove to make ends meet with his small poultry farm.

Sometimes Jim dreamed too; dreamed of giving his wife a better home, a life of greater ease, and rest from the endless cooking, cleaning, sweeping, the boiling of meal for the fowls while he went on his rounds to sell them.

He dreamed of giving her the house that she loved, and thought of her beside him on the lawn in the warm summer evenings, watching the waterbirds upon the pond and the lilies that closed at sunset. He dreamed, and the dream helped him, too, in the struggle for existence, for there seemed little promise of better things.

But how Mary loved that old house! and sometimes her yearning hurt him. It hurt him to hear her talk of it so often, knowing that he would never be able to afford to give it her.

It hurt him to see the lines of care and weariness return to the face that was so happy when she awoke from her dream. If only his Uncle Charles . . . !

But it was no use thinking of that, for he had a son to inherit his money. Mary never tired of talking about that house, and Jim listened because it made her happy to talk about it.

FEAR

When he came in from the farmyard to his midday meal, so well cooked by his wife, and so daintily served, she always had a new story of it to tell him —something new she had seen there or thought of doing to the garden, till Jim began to fear that it preyed too much upon her mind. But her mind was always so clear, and the house so real to her, that he let her chatter on.

"You know, Jim, when you are out with the fowls and I am doing my work, I hardly know I am here, and feel that I am in that garden."

One morning Mary awoke with a puzzled expression on her face which Jim was quick to notice.

"My sweet," said he, "you haven't dreamt of the house this time."

"Yes, I have, but it was not the same. There was fear in it that had not been there before. It was . . . uncomfortable. . . . I don't know how to describe it, but it was not so happy. I thought I saw people there and they were afraid of something.

"Yes, I remember now . . . in the lounge . . . a woman sitting on the couch reading . . . she suddenly dropped her book and rushed from the room. I have had that kind of dream before. Once there were two little girls playing on the lawn; they looked up, threw out their arms and ran into the house. I was not afraid, but they were."

"You must stop thinking and talking about that house, my sweet." And Jim hastened to change the subject whenever she returned to it.

Confound Uncle Charles! The old man was rich enough to give him the house and not miss the money it cost. He could give Mary something that meant to her even more than the children they could not afford. If it

were not for his useless son, Robert, who had never done a day's work in his life, he would inherit his fortune. Confound Robert!

It was six months later when Jim found a registered letter on his plate at breakfast.

"That looks exciting, Jim. What is it?"

Jim read his name on the front of it; turned it over and looked at the seals on the back; weighed it in his fingers.

"I don't know," said he.

"Why not open it dear? Might be lots of money."

"Not likely," said Jim breaking the seals.

He read it through in silence and then began at the beginning and read it through again. Could it be true or had he begun to dream? The room swam before his eyes.

It was from Uncle Charles's solicitors. There had been an accident . . . a very sad motor accident and Mr. Charles Bancroft and his son, had been killed. Would Mr. James Bancroft communicate. . . ?

Terrible! Father and son, both killed. . . . Uncle Charles and Robert were dead . . . dead . . . yes, both dead!"

"Is anything wrong dear?"'

Without speaking, Jim got up from the table; went across to the window and looked out at the hen coops. There seemed to be thousands of hen coops . . . coops as far as he could see . . . coops that he hated the sight of.

"Jim, dear! What's the matter? Is anything wrong?"

"Wrong!" echoed Jim. "Good God no! Nothing's wrong. Read that."

Mary took the letter and read it through in silence. For a moment she looked at Jim, and then in an almost inaudible whisper.

"Jim! Jim! The house!"

Jim looked at his watch.

"I can just catch it," said he.

Mary was alone. She fed the fowls and filled their drinking bowls; left a note for Jim, took her bicycle and rode to the village.

She hired the ramshackle taxi and drove ten miles in it to the house. It looked deserted. There were no curtains at the windows; the lawn was unmown and weeds grew in the flowerbeds, but smoke issued from one of the chimneys.

Mary rang the bell and waited.

The door was opened by an old man. His hair was white as snow and his back was bent with age, but his wrinkled face was gentle and radiated peace and goodwill.

"At last!" said he. "Come in, dear lady, come in. I am the caretaker."

Mary looked at him in some surprise.

"Is this house to let?" she asked.

"It has been to let for six months and no one will take it."

"But why not?"

"It is haunted."

Mary shuddered and her heart sank.

"Haunted! And you live here all alone? What is the ghost?"

"A young and beautiful woman," said he smiling.

"Have you ever seen her?"

"Very often."

"And you are not afraid?"

"No.—You are the ghost."

The Hill Road

And the Haunted Motor Car

by G. CASEY

ALLOW me to introduce myself and an experience which befell me during a late month of last year, the memory of which has beset me so that I have not known a moment of rest day and night until this hour. I have passed through a horror from which even the relief of description has been denied me, for the common-sense men among whom I work and live look askance at the unwilling witness of strange happenings.

So it happens that a written narrative is the only outlet for the unhealthy fears and presences which scepticism has compelled me to dam up within my mind. For, when the intelligence of man comes up against a state or enters a sphere which is beyond its comprehension, then the man lives with fear as his bedfellow until he can proportion the load upon the shoulders of his herd and lose his own strangeness as the waters of a brook are lost, commingled and dissolved in the flow of the river.

But the instinct of the herd detects such fear in the individual and shies away from him, leaving his fear to burgeon and work on his mind like yeast in a vat.

I am Marco Cervera, a Spaniard of good family, a family which has served our country for generations within the state, beyond the seas and, of later years, in the vineyards of Jerez de la Frontera. Here, for the past two hundred years, my fathers have cultivated the pale grapes from which sherry is made, pressed them into the golden wine, and shipped them off to England, and all over the world, acquiring for themselves in the process, and for me, a handsome fortune and a name which is consonant with integrity and position.

There is a strain of English blood in my family (the three demi-lions of the Culpeppers are quartered in one corner of our bearings), and an English influence and sympathy which is a good deal stronger. My grandfather, my father and I were all educated at Winchester and Queen's College, and regular business trips in later years to the great London houses who handle our wines have contrived to make me, at any rate, more of an Englishman than a Spaniard.

Chief factor of all is that I am a confessed anglophile, a student of the greatest race and the most insoluble enigma that the world has ever known. Londoners do not guess that I am a foreigner until they catch my name aright; countrymen recognise me as of the soil, and, by the soil, they mean only English soil.

I set down all this only to show you that the events which I am coming to describe are the witness of one who has some pretensions to education, who cannot lightly be dismissed as an emotional Latin.

The civil war which is still racking my unhappy country ruined the business which two hundred years of loving care had built up, and made of me a refugee and a nithling. With the swiftness of palsy, the venerable firm of Jose Cervera y Compania ceased to exist, and with it went my life of wealth, traditional and commercial eminence.

As I say, I came to England as little more than a refugee (I called you English the most insoluble enigma in the world. Why do you harbour foreigners when your own countrymen are on the dole?).

My fortunes, however, did not entirely desert me. Almost at once I received an offer to join the staff of a small firm of London wine-shippers as a representative. Not a firm, admittedly, in the front line of the trade, but one which had the advantage of a young director with progressive ideas on the board.

Briefly, the young director believed that a representative who had the education of an English gentleman, who knew sherry better than his own soul, and yet who was of undeniable Spanish extraction, might do much to advance the fortunes of Gray & Geering, Wine-shippers and Distillers. The young director was right.

My terms were generous. An adequate salary, commission on orders received and the discount of my travelling expenses, soon enabled me to establish myself in a modest way in a charming Kentish village in the Darenth valley, from which I made my journeys.

My firm had provided me with a car, a second-hand saloon of American origin, monstrous proportions and blatant design. (You English, why do you buy your cars abroad when you have the finest automobile engineers in the world on your doorstep? Why do you buy your luxuries overseas when your country men are in want?)

As I came to know the roads of the district, I discovered a side-road—a beautiful hill-slope arched over at one end with magnificent beeches—whereby I could cover the last few miles to Eynsford without the dangers of the arterial road. I used the road habitually, loving the quietness and the peace and the beauty of it. Then I became vaguely disturbed.

STRANGE JOURNEY

I was hurrying back from a journey to the South Coast on a dark November night. I turned into this old road and drove quickly over the first mile of its length, vaguely admiring the bare, storm-tossed boughs of the beeches against the lesser darkness of the winter sky. My thoughts, such as they were, were about equally divided between the leafless beauty of the beeches and the supper and the warm hearth that lay five miles ahead.

The tinted windows of the car admitted a faint glimmer of starlight, and the discreet glow of the dashlight served further to diffuse the gloom. The big engine was running smoothly, and brought the car to the top of the rise without a fault.

I had just topped the crest, and was driving slowly down the other side of the hill on the last lap home, when a curious knowledge possessed me. I knew that I was no longer alone.

The big car and I, drifting smoothly through the night, were no longer an entity. It seemed as if there were others with us, as if I were quietly driving with companions—and yet I was alone. Home, I put the car away with the not unpleasant reflection, vague but piquant, that the journey had not been as tedious as before. I was to envy my own detachment a week later.

Each of my journeys during the following seven days brought me home through the old road between the beech-trees, and increasingly I became aware that there were others making the journey with me, others whom I could not see. Often I glanced shamefacedly over my shoulder into the back seat. The ruby-greenish pallor of the dashlight inevitably showed that the body of the car was empty.

Once I switched on the interior light

and closely inspected the back. It was huge, cheaply upholstered with deep seats and a stained patch of carpet on the floor and was most conclusively empty. Then, as the days passed on, the manifestation of the presence began to increase. They who rode with me began to encroach on my senses as well as on my imagination.

My feeling that I was no longer driving alone I knew to be true. Further, I had to admit that I could hear things, faint sounds, a whispering and the pulse of a struggle and a scuffle.

Yet the back of the car was empty and bare. On Thursday night, the sounds had so wrought upon me that I halted on the crest of the hill, alighted and walked round the car to assure myself, at least, that no material change had taken place.

The car's enormous tail, the twin rear-lights, protuberant and obscene as the eyes of lobsters, the vast expanse of dingy celluose and the fat redundancies of the wings were as faultless in their effrontery as ever they were. There was no sign of an accident on tyre, bumper or running-board.

Then I resumed my seat at the wheel, and then I became still, and the pores of my skin rose and pricked and my brow was icy cold—for I had returned into that dreadful Company. Thereafter, I avoided Old Polhill—as the road was called—and made my way homeward by the great arterial road that ran along a higher slope of the Weald, counting two extra miles and the dangers of a right-handed turn lightly against the shadow of the old road below me.

Then came December, with the snowdrifts lying heavily on Polhill. The great arterial road was a mosaic of skid-marks between deep banks of snow and slush. With a shiver of distaste and with a sudden resolution, I changed down to third and swung off from the main road and on to Old Polhill.

Gradually, the big car slowed down before the gradient and then, within fifty yards of the summit, I heard the sounds again. They came dreadfully loudly—a scuffling, as of a struggle; a whining sound, almost like a human being begging or pleading and, over all, the deeper and more authoritative murmur of what suggested itself to me as a man's voice.

Then came a hideous screech of terror—plangent and unmistakable—which declined into a blabbering run of pleading, supplicating notes, terribly like the whimpering of a trapped rabbit. I sat immobile and sweating at the wheel. My foot on the accelerator froze and the big car stalled, spluttered, and came to a standstill. With a final tremor the engine was at rest. Except for Those that were with me, I was still and alone.

A dreadful screech rang out, together with the admonitory bass of a man's voice. The screech rose to an intense pitch and almost strung me to the pitch of jumping from the car and seeking safety among the dank boles of the trees.

But, as my mind turned frantically towards escape, the scream was abruptly checked; it seemed as though the sound now came from behind a muffling veil; and thereafter there was only a succession of choking noises, infinitely more dreadful.

TERROR IN THE WOOD

I cannot describe my state at the time. Terror is the word that keeps springing to my mind, but it is insufficient to apply to the condition of immobile panic to which I was reduced. I can only hint at it by likening my mental attitude to that of the victim dragged to a sacrificial altar and

held thereon for the length of the incantation.

I was at my wits' end with shock and dread when deliverance came creeping slowly through the night. In the driving-mirror I could faintly discern two wan pools of light adjacent to one another, such as might come from the candle-lanterns of a country cart. With agonising slowness the feeble illuminations became larger; yet I sat as if paralysed and unable to stir a limb.

The dreadful sounds from the rear became more intense and dramatic as the approaching vehicle drew near. The seat creaked wildly, and the gibbering accelerated to another wild screech.

The palms of my hands were as wet as mill-wheels, and my feet and the features of my face seemed to be making motions beyond my knowledge. Chained, speechless and numb, I prayed frantically for the arrival of the creeping vehicle, implored those thin pale lights to come near and ease my terror.

They came near at last and the noise in the back stifled itself into a deep, murmurous, declining breathing of air. The two candle-lanterns waxed and waned in a slight vaporous haze, such as might emanate from the body of a horse sweating his way uphill. Distantly, I could discern the ragged outline of brushes and pots and pans, the usual concomitants of the trade of a travelling tinker.

And, even as I watched, there came from the rear of the car a most dreadful scream, far transcending in its crescendo the earlier piteous outcries; then it was muffled again, and strangled, and died quickly away in a series of spasmodic gaspings. Yet not spasmodic, for each gasp seemed hideously to synchronise with the weary plodding of hooves, as the tinker's van drew abreast and passed on.

For a brief instant, I could discern the face of the driver peering down towards me in the yellow glow of the candle-lanterns. A narrow, bearded, evil face, sinister and sharply curious.

The noises at the back gathered themselves into a last intensification of conflict and then died away. A smooth, slithery sound followed, terminated by a soft bump, as if some plastic bulk had fallen to the floor-boards of the car. There was a deep breathing, irregular, intense and exhausted. A hideous thing had passed.

Something broke around me and gave me legs. I stumbled from the car and raced up the steep bank of loam towards the arterial road. Its wet shining surface seemed prosaic and soothing after the darkness of the valley. I think I must have been shouting and striking out with my fists against the evil stare of the tinker, which I saw again and again in the gnarled and twisted boles of the beeches. The sough of their branches sounded like a soft body falling to earth.

I stopped the first car that passed along the arterial road and implored the driver's help. Even as he was gaping at my ravings a black sports car drew up alongside and two policemen alighted. Almost I could have clutched them, for the familiar uniform and decorous presence of the law was as the green earth after the filth of the pit into which I had peeped.

Briefly, and as coherently as I could, I told my story. They listened attentively, but unmoved. Then the driver of the police car, a young man with a slick manner and a nasty smear of black moustache on either side of his mouth, enquired the number of my car.

I told him and then, in a very wooden voice, low-pitched, as though he were asking a question to which he knew the answer, he asked for a description of the vehicle.

"Wisconsin, twenty-five horse-power," I answered, "grey body with scarlet room and . . ."

". . . green-tinted windows," added the young policeman in the same tone. Then he affected a brisker address. "You'd better stay here, sir, whilst we

go down and take a look round."

I sat in the back of the black sports car and watched them disappear, downwards between the dark trees, feeling sick within myself and shivering frightfully. Soon they returned and, when they spoke, their voices were dull and troubled, and they kept their eyes fixed to the ground.

"Seems the best thing that we can do is for me to drive this gentleman home, whilst you take his car along to the station," said the policeman who drove. "He can pick it up in the morning."

As we pulled up outside my door, I remembered that it was Friday night, my housekeeper's day off. Supper would be laid ready for me, but I shied at the hint of loneliness in the empty house. Making it an impulse of hospitality, I dragged the young policeman in for a drink. Nothing loath, he settled himself in the deep arm-chair before the fire and drank thirstily of the tumbler of brandy and soda which I pressed upon him. He watched me from beneath lowered lashes as I hustled about to envelope myself in the atmosphere of home, and the things which were solid and tangible and which I loved.

THE STORY

Then he told me the story of Old Polhill.

Some three years ago, it appeared, a Major Cobb (and I had sufficiently recovered to enquire of myself why you English tolerate these pretentious civilian majors), a Major Cobb went down the drop at Maidstone gaol, having confessed to the murder of Alice Snow, a domestic servant from the near-by village of Otford. The circumstances of the crime were unusually sordid.

Cobb picked up the girl, as the expression is, as she was walking home along the arterial road. She was nothing averse to a drive in a gentleman's motor-car with, possibly an interval or two for mildly amorous exploration. Unhesitatingly, the gallant major swung his car off from the main road and turned up the dark tunnel of Old Polhill. Near the top he stopped the car and the couple retired to the back seat.

Cobb, however, rapidly passed the limit which the girl set upon her complaisance and made a demand to which she could not accede. Poor fool, Cobb had surmounted such a difficulty before. Later on, exhausted with her struggles, she was about to submit to him on the score of expediency, when she noticed the faint glimmer of candle-lights in the driving-mirror which faced her. That meant that another vehicle, with presumably a man in control, was coming up the hill.

Summoning her remaining strength, she uttered a piercing scream for help. But only once. Cobb's retaliation was instant. Now the more terrified of the two, he slipped his woollen muffler round her throat and stifled her cry. With painful slowness the tinker's van —for such it was—drew abreast and passed on.

The period must have been over five minutes, and all the time the muffler was drawing tighter and tighter under the powerful leverage of Cobb's arms and a knee in the small of her back. The tinker's van disappeared into the damp darkness ahead, and simultaneously did Cobb reach the noon of his martial career—by the panic strangulation of an indiscreet kitchenmaid within the body of a foreign motor-car.

The tinker, who considered the parking of a car on Old Polhill at such an hour smacked of irregularity, stopped the next policeman whom he met and

descanted upon his doubts. The policeman turned aside from his path and came upon the car and, after a short search, upon the craven warrior, foolishly and feebly attempting to bury the body among the sodden beech leaves.

Three months later, a judge of the High Court, his chaplain, his martial, twelve jurymen, an under-sheriff, a gaoler, a prison chaplain, a chief warder, two principal warders, a deputy prison governer, two ordinary warders, an executioner and his two assistants, and an engineer brought the career of Major Cobb to a righteous close.

"What day was it when she died?" I asked hesitantly.

"This night three years back," answered the young policeman soberly.

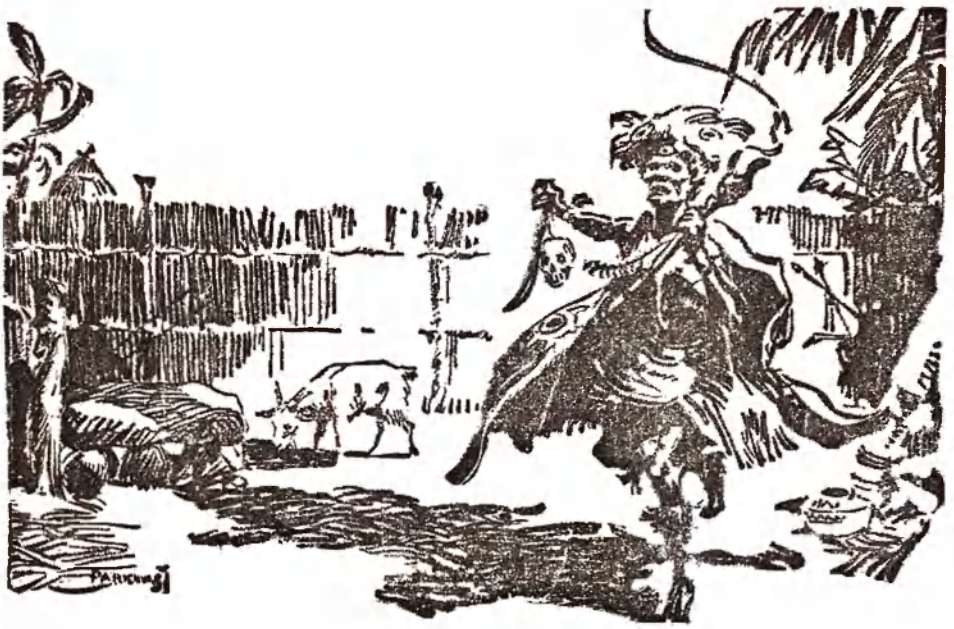
"And the car?"

"The same car will be in the station garage by now, sir," was the answer.

The following morning I walked into a garage in the local market town and instructed the manager to value the car as it stood in the yard of the police station. When I got his price, I rang up my firm on the telephone and asked to be allowed to purchase the car for that figure. After some genial chaff, the young director agreed without serious objection and I posted him a cheque—all the money I possessed in the world, as it happened—within the next five minutes.

I drove the car along the arterial road to a car-breaker's yard which I had noticed idly on more than one occasion. The proprietor willingly purchased the car for fifteen pounds, on condition that it was to be broken up there and then and under my eyes.

As I watched the acetylene torch carve and quarter the bulbous shape of the hated machine there fell an eerie stillness over the busy yard, enduring for almost a full minute. A strange, uncanny hush. Then someone laughed a little unnaturally and the hammers went clanging on as they had done before.



Death Drum

The Witch Doctor's Curse

by E. W. GRIER

THE big man strode across to the sideboard and splashed out a half-tumbler of Cape brandy and drank it neat, replenishing his glass before flinging himself into a grass chair.

"Well," he snarled, "got anything to say?"

His wife shrugged her shoulders.

"It wouldn't do any good," she said wearily.

"You're right for once. It wouldn't. I'm glad you've learned that amount of sense at last." He stopped to light a cigarette. "Call your pet bushman to come and take my leggings off, and then get dinner ready. I can do with it."

Janet Kenton rose slowly from her chair, but before she reached the door she turned and faced her husband.

"Dinner was ready at seven. It's nine o'clock now, and——"

Kenton laughed harshly.

"I knew you wouldn't be able to resist it. I know dinner is spoiled. That's nothing uncommon, anyway, let's have it. And if that nigger doesn't hurry I'll get behind him with a sjambok. He's fit for little more than a lady's maid anyway."

Ignoring the insult, Janet left the room, returning a minute later, followed by a diminutive, wizened coloured man.

"Take the master's boots off, Tuis," she ordered, "and then you may go to bed. It's late."

The little man knelt before his master and set to work with trembling fingers. But the woman, looking on, knew that it was not fear that caused

the agitation. There was little that the African feared.

It was hatred—a burning hatred that was born on her father's farm during the days of her engagement eight years ago. After her marriage he had followed her, covering the nine hundred miles on foot in order to serve the mistress whom he worshipped, as he had served her father, and, as a child, her grandfather.

Sometimes she wondered why she had refused the little man's many offers to rid her of the bully that was her husband; for Tuis, old in years, was older in the knowledge of Africa than the Zulus themselves. An ugly, strange little man, but her only friend in this harsh land.

Tuis replaced the boots with a pair of old carpet-slippers, took up the discarded footwear and left the room.

Kenton swallowed the rest of the brandy and looked across the room at his wife.

"Still sulking, eh? I thought we understood each other last night, or do you need another lesson?"

"Oh, don't go over it all again, Max. I can't stand it. I thought last night ended it when——"

"Cut out that mush," said Kenton scornfully. "Eight years ago I was good enough for you; too good, you said, in your sweet little way. You were keen enough then. After all, no one forced you to marry me. Why should I leave you alone now? You're still my wife."

He looked at her through narrowed eyes. It was easy to see the strain she was under, but he took a keen delight in breaking down the control she had once prided herself upon.

"You heard me, didn't you?" he rasped. "Why the hell should I leave you alone?"

Janet stood up and walked to the window. A young moon had replaced the sun and shed a misty light over the still cane-fields. Dark clumps of palms and wild banana stood out like gloomy sentinels in the distance where the cane ended. But she was in no mood for the beauty of the scene.

"God," she prayed, "if I could only leave it all. If I could only find peace." She turned to her husband.

"Why won't you let me go, Max? I'm no use to you," she said in a low voice. "What is the use of pretending any longer? We both hate each other—have hated each other ever since baby died." She raised her voice and began to tremble. "In my madness I cursed God when He took him away, but God was wiser than I. Now I thank Him. Oh, how I thank Him." Her eyes stared and she continued in a fierce whisper: "But I curse you, his murderer! Because you were afraid of what others might see, you left me to the mercy of a Zulu midwife."

The amused sneer on her husband's face goaded her on, and she flung aside all attempts at control. She took three rapid steps towards him, her whole body trembling violently.

"Why don't you go back to your black women and let me go? You spend most of your time there. Why not spend it all? You're no longer a white man; you're going native and think you'll drag me with you! You think you are going to keep me here, don't you? But you're wrong. I'm going, I tell you. D'you hear? You Kaffir!"

The sneer disappeared from the man's face and he stood up suddenly and struck her full in the mouth with the back of his hand. The blow was a brutal one and unexpected.

Janet's eyes opened wide in surprise. "Oh!" she gasped. "Oh!"

Her face was ashen and she stood perfectly still before the angry man, while a thin stream of blood ran from her broken lips down her chin, staining her white linen frock, but her eyes were still defiant.

Kenton struck her again. This time she swayed and almost fell, and clutched the back of a chair for sup-

port, but she still faced him, her eyes dull with pain.

The big man stood over her menacingly.

"You asked for that," he panted. "You've been asking for it for a long time. Well, now you've got it and perhaps it will show you just where you stand."

He turned his back on his wife contemptuously and crossed to the sideboard, poured out another brandy, drank it and sat down, eyeing the trembling woman slyly.

With a great effort Janet calmed her trembling body. She attempted to speak, but her broken lips refused to form the words. Then turning, she stumbled from the room and down into the garden, where she flung herself on to the dew-sodden lawn and sobbed uncontrollably.

"I WILL KILL HIM"

A sound caused her to look up and, she saw Tuis standing beside her with a tumbler of water and a clean towel. She took them from him silently and began to dab her bleeding mouth.

The little yellow man knelt beside her, peering anxiously into her face.

"I saw, Miss Janet," he whispered. "Let me kill him now, look." He showed her a handful of tiny feathered arrows and a bow so small that he could almost cover it with his hand. "One of these and he will die where he sits. Oh, that the daughter of old Baas Brandon should be treated like a Zulu umfazi. Tell me to kill him now, that the spirit of the old Baas may rest."

Janet shook her head.

"Rather kill me, Tuis. I am too much of a coward to do it myself."

The bushman was silent. His gnarled, furrowed face was working strangely, as if he was in pain. He was thinking deeply.

"Listen, Miss Janet," he whispered presently, "if I may not kill him now, there is hope that even now his death-spirit is close to him. For when 'Mbusi, the witch doctor, whom he flogged to death, cursed him, Tuis was near; hidden in the long grass behind the stables. It was a terrible curse, Miss Janet, and I have seen signs that——"

"I forbid you to speak like that, Tuis," ordered Janet sharply. "The Baas Kenton is a white man and you are a kaffir. Don't let me hear you speak like that again."

The little man winced at the word "kaffir" and sighed deeply. The whites were a mystery to him. He tiptoed towards the bungalow and peered through the living-room window.

"Look, Miss Janet," he said when he returned, "the Baas is asleep, I think he is very drunk and will not wake till morning. Go to your room before the night sickness takes you. Tuis will help you, and if the Baas moves so much as a finger he will die. I, Tuis, say it!" He drew himself up and glared at his mistress defiantly.

Janet was too weary to argue and she followed the servant meekly into the bungalow.

"Lock the door, Miss Janet," whispered Tuis. "To-morrow I will have a plan."

But Janet did not go to bed at once, she sat in the darkness before the open window and stared unseeing across the moonlit cane-fields. For once she was glad that her husband was drunk, at least she had been spared the ordeal of sitting before him at dinner. It wasn't like him to forget a meal.

Beyond the dark hibiscus hedge she could see into the dimly-lit interior of Tuis's hut. Crouched before a large bowl, from which an evil-looking smoke

was issuing, she saw the bushman; the feeble light was shining right into his face and the expression she saw on it was frightening. She could see from the movement of his lips that he was talking.

She shuddered and drew the curtains. There are hidden places in the lives of these little Africans into which it is not good to pry. She sat in the darkness thinking, and the little breeze that precedes the dawn was stirring the broad leaves of the banana-palms before she went to bed.

Janet did not see her husband until the evening of the next day; his face was puffy and discoloured, and it was evident that he had been drinking heavily. But she was glad to observe that his truculent manner had left him. During dinner he cast furtive, almost ashamed glances in her direction, but the only remark he vouchsafed was that he had "a hell of a head."

It was late when the first note of the drum beat upon their ears; its effect upon Kenton was startling. He sprang from his chair, upsetting the glass of brandy from the arm and stared at his wife with a strange, questioning fear in his bloodshot eyes. For fully a minute he maintained the pose and then sank slowly into his chair, grasping the wooden arms until his fingers whitened.

Fear is an ugly thing, especially when it is seen on a big man. Janet had never seen her husband afraid, and she was alarmed at the sight. His body seemed to shrink and a dull, dead expression came into his eyes; the expression that comes into the eyes of an animal when he senses the approach of death.

The throb of the drum was regular and deep; it seemed to come from a great distance, its beat felt rather than heard. To the listeners in the silent room it might have been the throbbing of some gigantic heart. Then it grew faint, until it almost faded away, when it was brought back on the wind with an intensity that seemed to vibrate the very windows.

In no country in the world is the beat of a drum so awe-inspiring, so pregnant with mystery, as it is in Africa. All nature holds its breath to listen during the shuddering spells; the ceaseless song of the cicada is hushed, and even the frog-choir in the marshes pauses to hear.

FEAR

Kenton's display of fear puzzled Janet, until she remembered that, years ago, he had given instructions that every drum on the farm was to be destroyed, but of the cause she had no knowledge. She took a furtive glance at him, his face was drawn and haggard, and the stubble on his chin showed up sharply against his grey skin. He was breathing quickly, and she could hear him whispering:

"God! God!"

The beat of the drum ceased abruptly and Kenton sagged in his chair like a man who has been suddenly released from the grip of an electric current. Presently he rose, pale and shaking, and poured out half a tumbler of brandy and drank it at a gulp. The fiery spirit seemed to bring back a little of his confidence, but the shadow of fear still lurked in his eyes. He turned and faced his wife and made an attempt to explain his behaviour.

"God! How I hate that sound—I always have," he muttered.

"But Max," ventured Janet, "I don't understand. What is there about the sound that makes you so—that upsets you so? You're not a native."

She no longer feared this man whom

fear had stripped of all bluster, indeed, a tinge of pity had taken its place.

Kenton did not reply at once, but began pacing the floor with slow steps, while the discordant song of the night insects filled the little room with sound. Suddenly he stopped and faced his wife, his eyes were pleading.

"Janet," he muttered. "You've got to help me. I know I've made you hate me, but you loved me once. You've got to help me, I say!" He paused to mop his forehead. "I'll tell you the whole thing, then you will pity me—you must—after all, you're a woman.

"You remember the death of the witch-doctor fellow, 'Mbusi? You did not know that it was through a flogging that he died, did you? It was I that flogged him, egged on by the swine who has taken his place, Imfezi. Although he deserved to die, I never meant to kill him, but he was old and couldn't stand up to it. You must believe that." His voice fell to a whisper.

Before 'Mbusi died he cursed me. You may laugh at that, but I have always lived among these people and I have seen things—terrible things. You don't know. I remember the words—every one of them—as if it were yesterday; I can even see his red eyes and his thin, poisonous lips. This is what he said:

"'You have killed me, white man, who is also a snake. As the puff-adder warns its enemies, so shall I warn you, but my warning will be the drum—the drum of death! Listen for it, white man, in the quiet of the night, for I, who shall be a snake, will return to kill you!'

"That is how 'Mbusi cursed me, and I have received his warning. You heard it."

Janet was by now thoroughly alarmed. She knew, of course, that among the Zulus the curse of a witch-doctor was feared above all things, and only spoken of in whispers, but her husband was a white man, a man of substance and authority, to whom the curse of a savage should mean nothing.

"Max," she said sharply, "you ought to be ashamed of yourself. There are things about you that I dislike, but I have always admired your courage. Now you seem to be turning coward. What we heard was probably some umfaan amusing himself, and no connection with the curse at all. Do try and pull yourself together."

A new light came into Kenton's eyes.

"You may be right, Janet, Umgazana has got a beer drink on to-night. That'll be where it came from. I'll break his blasted neck to-morrow. I'll call that bushman of yours, he may know something about it."

He went to the back of the house and roared into the night. There was no reply at first, but at the second call the little man appeared, his eyes blinking in the bright light.

"Where have you been? Why the devil don't you come at once?" asked Kenton.

"I was in my hut, baas," stammered the bushman. "The drum frightened me. Evil spirits are about, my baas. This very night I saw the black shadow of a snake in the moon, and there was a——"

"That will do," snapped the planter. "I want to know who was beating the drum. Do you know anything about it?" He eyed the servant suspiciously.

"Me, baas?" enquired Tuis with innocent surprise. "How should Tuis know? That was no man, it was an evil spirit. Tuis has no dealings with spirits. It was the death drum, and the shadow of a snake on the moon was a sign that——"

"Oh, to blazes with your signs!" roared Kenton. "Tell Imfezi that I want to see him to-morrow morning—no, tell him to be here at sunset. I'll swear that scoundrel knows something about it. Leave early in the morning."

"But baas," ventured Tuis, "how can Imfezi help? His medicine is not strong enough to fight death. Better baas get on to his horse and ride to the railway.

From there he may go to Durban and perhaps escape the death. For though I cannot say for certain that the death drum is for baas, it is well known that it is only beaten when a great man is about to die, and who is there greater than baas?

"Nevertheless, I will tell Imfezi, who is old, and therefore wise. It may be that he can help." He shook his head sadly and added: "But me, I do not think so." Something in the white man's eyes must have warned him, for he sprang back just in time to avoid a vicious kick, and disappeared in the direction of his hut.

NIGHT SOUNDS

Janet noticed that her husband avoided her eyes when he returned to the living-room, but she saw that the fear had returned. When she saw him reach for the bottle of brandy she gave up all idea of being able to help him and, wishing him good night, she went to her bedroom. Unable to sleep, she lay under the screened window and listened to the night sounds—the sounds that had frightened her so when she first arrived at the farm with her husband.

Now, there was something comforting about them, the heavy drone of the frogs, the shrill chorus of the cicada, and the dry rasping of the banana leaves when the breeze stirred them, the cry of the bush-baby. The mysterious, fascinating music of Africa——

The next day, half an hour before sunset, Imfezi presented himself at the farm. He was clad in the traditional garb of the witch-doctor; a wizened, dried-up specimen of the Zulu race. On his head he wore the blown-up bladder of a goat, and suspended from his neck was a necklet composed of the dyed vertebræ of snakes. For clothing he wore a girdle of monkeys' tails.

Tuis, after having registered the expressions of awe and fear that every member of the dark art considers his due, called his master. Imfezi's salute was perfunctory, unlike the respectful greeting that is usually accorded the white man by the Zulu.

"The 'Nkoos sent for Imfezi," he began in a quiet voice, "and he has come. Is it that the 'Nkoos wishes him to throw the bones? Have his cattle strayed or is it perhaps an enemy that has——"

Kenton cut him short.

"Enough of that talk, Imfezi. You know what I want to know. Last night I heard a drum beaten. What do you know about it?"

The old man stared at the planter impassively and answered slowly:

"The 'Nkoos who knows the ways of the Zulus, knows surely that it is no man who beats the death drum—that it is a spirit? And Imfezi, even Imfezi would not dare to throw the bones, for they, who are the silent tongues of the spirits, cannot speak against the will of their masters. Especially when it is he who dwells in the shadows."

The big man's attitude was menacing.

"Imfezi," he began in a low voice, "you know the kind of man I am and I know you. I know you for the scoundrel you are, and I mean to get the truth out of you, if I have to squeeze it from you with my two hands. Out with it!"

The threat left the ancient Zulu unmoved.

"Even the white man, it seems, does not know everything," he said, with an insolent light in his eyes, "or he would know that Imfezi, who is only the slave of the spirits, cannot question his masters." He gave an expressive little shudder. "If that is all that the 'Nkoos

wants from me, I fear I can be of no help to him." He turned to go.

"No, you don't," snarled Kenton, "I'm going to show you that I am your master!" He produced from behind his back a small but vicious-looking sjambok. "Now," he said grimly, "the truth!"

The eyes of the witch-doctor flickered, but he gave no other sign. He was silent.

A sudden rage overcame the planter. He stepped back a pace, and with a lightning-like movement struck savagely at the native. The cruel lash split the parchment skin of Imfezi's face and blood ran on to his naked chest. He winced but did not move.

"That is only the beginning," panted Kenton, "speak, unless you want me to strip your hide off you!"

The Zulu's eyes became mere slits.

"I can see that the 'Nkoos recalls the curse of 'Mbusi. Does he want Imfezi to curse him too?" He laughed, and the sound was like the crackle of breaking sticks.

Tuis, who heard the sound, shivered.

"Surely," he said to himself, "Imfezi will blast him where he stands." For the laugh of the witch-doctor is like the warning of a puff-adder.

Imfezi drew himself up and pointed a long, withered finger at Kenton.

"Umlungo," he began in a low voice, vibrant with anger, "you have struck Imfezi, and for that you should suffer, but you are in the hands of the spirits and I may not touch you." His voice became shrill and little flecks of foam appeared on his lips. His pointing finger quivered. "They wait for you, Umlungo!" He turned abruptly and walked away.

No Zulu uses the word "umlungo" (which means white man) except as an insult, but if Kenton heard it he gave no sign. To Janet, who stood in the doorway, he looked like a man who has staked everything and lost, and who has given up hope.

That evening the slow throb of the drum came upon them again, but to Kenton it was like lashing an unconscious man. His face flushed, and his eyes staring through the open window, he sat in silence. He had not moved when Janet rose and went to bed. He was still in the same position when the lamp gave a little flicker and went out, filling the room with the stench of smouldering wick.

When Madevu, the kitchen-boy, entered the room early next morning, he was surprised to find his master asleep and fully clothed. He placed two cups of coffee on the table, knocked on the door of his mistress's room and stole silently away.

An hour later he peered into the room and saw that his master had not moved. He sought the advice of Tuis.

The Bushman sneered.

"Is the Zulu such a coward that he is afraid to waken the Baas?" He spat with contempt. "I, Tuis, will show you." He stepped towards a shelf upon which was displayed a glittering array of pots and pans, and swept them to the floor with a deafening clatter.

With an oath Madevu leapt at him, but Tuis was adept at this game and easily avoided his rushes.

"Stop this baboon business, Madevu," grinned the little man. "I have shown you how to wake the Baas. If he does not wake now, he is dead."

Madevu grunted.

"You have disturbed the 'Nkosikaas needlessly and the 'Nkoos still sleeps."

Tuis peered into the living-room, and after signing to the other to be silent, tiptoed towards the silent form in the chair. When he returned there was a serious expression in his small eyes.

"I said you were a baboon, Madevu," he whispered, "for who but a fool would not have seen that the Baas is dead! There is a strange thing in that room, the Baas is dead and there is a puff-adder under the table. The strange thing is that the Baas has not been bitten. His body is still white and it is well known that the body of a white

man turns black when the ibululu bites him."

The kitchen-boy trembled and turned a dirty grey colour.

"Lend me one of your sticks, Kaffir," said Tuis scornfully, "and I will kill the snake while you pick up your pots. Then I will tell Miss Janet."

That evening Janet saw the little man crouching over his fire. He was muttering to himself, and she caught a word here and there. He was praying, if it could be called that, that the spirits he had invoked would leave him. The sweat streamed from his tortured face as he bent over the fire. She moved closer, suspicion mounting in her brain.

She saw the Bushman poke with a stick something that writhed and twisted in the flames like a living thing. She caught her breath when she saw that in the heart of the fire were the charred remains of a small native drum.

The distant howl of a hungry jackal broke the long silence, and Janet returned to the bungalow as silently as she had come.

Armand's Return

The Old Gardener's Secret

by HENRY RAWLE

THERE will remain with me, as long as I live, the memory of a garden. A garden singular; fantastic, you will say. But whether or no this strange episode rightly belongs to the realms of fantasy does not greatly matter; in moments of darkness I recall again its fragrant image and I am well content.

It happened not so long ago at the country residence of a friend of mine. I had been invited there upon my return to England, after nearly three years of aimless wandering, during which time I had learned only too well the significance of the old adage refering to "rolling stones."

It was in the early autumn that I began my sojourn at the house of my friend. The fading glory of summer had but with lingering reluctance given way to the advent of the most colourful season of the year and the countryside was at its best. Almost the first thing I noticed about the place where I was to stay was the garden.

Although no lover of anything that suggests cultivation I was immediately struck with its sheer beauty.

It was very large and set out in terraces and steps with winding pathways leading through rockeries and beneath trellised archways covered with rambling roses whose fragrance took one's breath away. There were little shady arbours almost obscured by thick foliage; and rhododendron bushes. Exquisite little rock plants, many-hued, clustered and spread everywhere so that not a patch of earth was visible, while convulvulus and creeper struggled and climbed in tangled profusion on either hand.

In midsummer this must indeed have been a garden of delight, but now, strewn about the moss-grown pathways, rose-petals mingled with the gold and brown of the fallen leaves. For the summer was gone and the roses were fading. My bedroom, I noticed, which was at ground-level, looked out on to the garden, easy access to which was provided by the French windows which opened out on to a low balcony.

The strange beauty of the garden affected me greatly, and later on in the day I remarked to my host upon its wonderful arrangement and design. He mentioned almost casually that its present formation was practically identical with the original which was laid out nearly a century ago, and that it was tended daily by an old gardener who lived in the near-by village. He had, it appeared, looked after the garden for very many years before my host had taken over the tenancy.

"He's a queer bird," said my host, "hardly ever speaks; but you'll always find him somewhere about the garden trimming this or cutting that. It's his religion, that garden, he's spent a lifetime in it."

There he let the matter drop, and for the rest of the evening we talked as two friends will who are reunited after a breach of three years.

That night the moon was high and the garden was transformed into a place of enchantment. Beautiful by day, in

the moonlight it became a fairyland of indescribable wonder; a place of intriguing shadows, fantastic, unreal. For a long while I stood gazing out upon the scene; and even after I had got into bed the moonlit garden still called to me through the tall windows.

My dreams that night were interlaced with autumn leaves and moonlight and fading roses. The next night the attraction of the garden was not to be resisted, and passing through the French windows I stepped out into the cool night air; wandering beneath the trellised briers for a while before retiring for the night.

It was on the third night that the incredible adventure befell me. I had turned in with but a cursory glance through the lofty windows resolved tonight not to fall under the spell of that magical garden. But later I awoke with a start from deep slumber, my attention riveted upon the window through which the pale moonlight played far into the room.

At first I put it down to a trick of perspective, an illusion caused by the shadows and the moonlight, but when I looked again I saw. I saw her standing there, a girl, a vision of delight. She stood peering eagerly into the room and tapping on the window.

She appeared to be dressed in the fashion of a bygone age, yet her clothes were scanty, almost negligible, of a soft filmy material. I was transfixed, yet not afraid, for her eyes were reassuring and lovely beyond words. And her face; a face more beautiful I never saw nor ever wish to see.

As I watched spellbound she beckoned me; at first amazement held me fast; then, like a man hypnotised, I arose and moved slowly towards the windows. Gently I swung them open lest I should scare away this creature of my dream.

But it was no dream; there she stood. Silent and mysterious she led the way down into the garden with a step so light she seemed scarce to touch the ground. Down the wandering pathways beneath the rose-laden arches through which the moon penetrated weirdly weaving a grotesque tapestry of light and shade where we walked.

Among the shady rockeries where the tiny creeping plants looked of a strange and unnatural hue in the moonlight. Its revealing radiance transformed all into a scene of exquisite beauty: a picture of indescribable delicacy. My lovely guide with her elusive charm seemed somehow to belong to this garden of delight.

THE MYSTIC SUMMER-HOUSE

The night air was warm, and heavy with the scent of roses. I walked close beside her now, yet she seemed not to notice me. Yet sometimes it seemed as though she whispered softly; but it may have been only the rustling of the fallen leaves. . . .

Once she paused, and reaching up to the tangled briers plucked one of the fragrant blooms; with a smile that was both sweet and sad she held it out for me to take, yet she smiled not at me, but beyond me.

Wondering, I took the symbolic flower and followed on. Now our way had led us to the bottom of the garden, where, almost obscured from view by creepers and ramblers, there nestled an old stone summer-house. Involuntarily I paused, for never before had I seen a structure of this description, either here nor in any other part of the grounds. But my silent companion kept on; and as she crossed the threshold inexplicably she disappeared.

For a moment I stood irresolute, then, turning, I slowly made my way back through that shadowy garden of the roses which now seemed strangely empty and bereft of beauty. Thoughtfully I closed the French windows behind me; but sleep, so unaccountably disturbed, eluded me for a long while.

I slept late into the morning, and

when I awoke the golden sunshine streamed in through the windows. My experience of the night seemed strangely unreal, weird, fantastic; with a start I remembered the rose. Irresistibly my eyes strayed to the little table where, the night before, I had left it.

There it was, startling in its tangibility; indisputable evidence of an incredible adventure.

I said nothing to my host of the happenings of the night, but at the earliest opportunity went out into the garden. I remembered distinctly where, last night, my strange quest had so abruptly ended. I looked for the rambler-covered bower; but in vain. No summer-house was there, nor any sign of one in the vicinity; only dense shrubbery and tangled briars.

Completely puzzled by the whole mysterious affair, I sought to explain this curious situation. Ultimately I came to the conclusion that there must be attached to this most unusual garden some legend or history and that the person most likely to know of such a thing was the old gardener.

Immediately I set off in search of the old fellow, but it was not until the afternoon that he put in an appearance. I found him clearing away some of the fallen leaves, mumbling to himself, as was his custom.

He was very old, but somehow he gave one the impression of being much older than he really was. Casually I got into conversation with the old chap, although he seemed uncommonly reluctant to talk about anything; my tentative enquiry about a summer-house, however, had an effect that was almost startling.

"Summer-house?" he echoed, eyeing me queerly. "Summer-house, did you say? Are you mad?" then after a pause: "There's been no such thing here for nigh on fifty years——"

And mumbling to himself he moved away as though resentful of my presence. I suddenly decided to tell this old man of my adventure of the night before. I said nothing of the rose, but his reactions to my account of the girl in white struck me as being most peculiar.

In a moment all his resentment had gone; he regarded me with an expression which I can only describe as a strange mixture of suspicion and doubt. When at length he spoke his voice was an almost inaudible whisper.

"So you've seen her, too . . . you saw her . . . last night . . . strange . . . strange . . ." He broke off; I was amazed.

"You know her then?" I asked, "you know who she is?" In his voice when he replied there was a world of wistfulness.

THE GARDENER'S STORY

"Yes . . . Yes, I know her . . . I've seen her too . . ." he murmured; then his voice strengthened.

"Listen, young man, and I will tell you of something of which I have never spoken before. You alone beside myself have been fated to see the vision of the garden—you alone shall hear her story . . .

"Very many years ago there lived in this house one William Ramos, a man well known and respected in the neighbourhood. He had a son, a young fellow named Armand. He was handsome, gay and loved by all who knew him; but none loved him so well as did Louise. Louise, delicate and sweet as any flower yet, full of a wild, strong passion.

"In her wistful beauty Armand found the answer to his fondest dreams. Seldom it is that the dreams of youth are destined to anything but sorry disillusionment; but to Armand she was the incarnation of desire. Day by day she grew and blossomed into the promise of radiant womanhood,

and in her infinite loveliness was all of woman he would ever need to ask.

"To Louise, Armand was a shrine at which she gladly worshipped; his lightest word of praise a bounty of delight, his slightest affectation of reproach a thing to grieve about. Together they found a happiness that few could hope to find; a thing too fine, too delicate long to endure the harshness of this relentless world.

"This garden was their trysting-place; every night they met beneath the roses and the moon. In the seclusion of the garden their love strengthened and grew into a thing beautiful beyond words. But lasting happiness, it seems, is not for mortals such as we; a glimpse and that is all of ecstasy.

"So it came about that the monstrous iron hand of fate reached out and shattered the happiness of Armand and Louise; at one fell stroke destroyed this youthful idyll, irreparably and for ever. It began with a lovers' quarrel; nothing more.

"Armand, hot-headed and impulsive as was his nature, went off to the war which then was raging in far Afghanistan. Some two months later came the report of his death—he had been killed in an ambush. Louise was distracted, frantic with grief, inconsolable, for sadly she held herself to blame for this stark tragedy.

"Stricken with sorrow and remorse, ceaselessly she grieved for Armand, whom she would never see again. At nights she would come to this garden so full of memories for her and wander distractedly among the roses. She pined and would not be comforted; it was feared she would lose her reason.

"But her frail nature could not for long withstand this cruel blow; soon she died. Died with grief. They found her early one morning in the summer-house at the bottom of the garden."

The old man paused, gazing into an incalculable distance; presently he continued:

"But her unresting spirit lingers on within that garden of shadows. Often at this time of the year she returns to walk again beneath the roses . . ."

The aged gardener was silent for a moment; his eyes were remote, inscrutable. It was almost with reluctance that he continued with his narrative.

"And then that blind unreasoning thing that men call the irony of fate stepped in, malevolent and evil. Not long after the passing of Louise there came an official message contradicting the report of the death of Armand Ramos. A case of mistaken identity; they regretted any inconvenience which may have been caused.

But there was little rejoicing in the house of Armand's father. And when he returned so full of joyous anticipation, Armand found an empty garden, a garden bereft of Louise and therefore without ecstasy, without reason. Without Louise his life held no significance. He went away again and travelled to the ends of the earth to escape his inward remorse.

"Years later he returned, to find his father's house in strange hands; he went to live near-by. But none knew of the return of Armand. . . . There was little that had not changed with the passing of the years; only the garden of the roses remained the same. To be near this garden of memories now became his one desire. . . ."

The old man broke off with the air of one who has confided too much in someone who after all was a stranger. Then suddenly a strange suspicion came to me; a great compassion overcame me, so that for a moment I could not speak. And his eyes made answer as I murmured:

"Armand Ramos—I will keep your secret. . . ."

The Furry Goblin of Lychpole Hill

Fable of the Farm and the Lady

by R. THURSTON HOPKINS

FIELD archæology—the digging-up of prehistoric burial-mounds, hill forts and flint mines has in it a certain speculative flavour. You have before you a symmetrical earth-mound, like a gigantic mole-hill. It is the burial-place of some prehistoric warrior. Three thousand years have passed since some tribe piled the earth over their chieftain with shovels made from the shoulder-blades of oxen. The mound may contain secrets of human culture and understanding which have been hidden since 1900 B.C.; it may contain cunningly shaped flint arrow-heads and axes, it may even reveal to the delighted eyes of the digger gold ornaments and jewellery of stupendous historic importance.

It was perhaps the hope of some such discovery that made Major Pitt-Grimshaw such a frequent attendant at all the field-work operations of the Devon and Cornwall Archæological Society—that hope, and also, maybe, because he was a rich man without any other hobby, and without a surplus of energy to drive him to seek more arduous pastimes.

"I have a fancy," he said over his coffee, "that the mound we are opening up on Lychpole Hill is holding some great surprise for us. There is a tradition around Lychpole that the mound covers the remains of a Bronze Age witch-doctor."

"It's about time something exciting happened," said Margery—who was his

daughter and also mistress of the house. "The last mound we opened did not offer any special thrills. I believe our loot was a cigar-box full of old pottery which looked like broken gramophone records."

"To-day," continued the Major, after a pause, "we are going to dig up those old ramparts about fifty feet south-west of the mound. It is said that beneath the turf at this spot we shall find the foundations of a heathen temple."

"Would that be the temple used by the devil worshippers you told me of the other day?" asked Margery, as she filled his cup.

"Yes," he said, "but, of course, it is all guess-work. We can only find the truth by digging."

Major Pitt-Grimshaw became meditative over a piece of toast.

"Well," remarked Margery, "even if the Devil himself popped out of your mound, it would provide some excitement in Salmonsbury. We're cold mutton out here—you and I. Nothing ever happens. Other women get all the fun.

"There is that girl Esther Steyning—on Monday she knocked down the policeman on point duty; on Wednesday she won the dancing competition at the Church Hall; on Friday her cousin arrived home from Borneo and gave her a pet snake. What a lovely week of excitement!"

"Cheer up, Margery," said the Major, round the end of a piece of toast. "I'll come home to-night and bring you a Rolls-Royce or a yacht, if you want it. Not many girls can expect more than that."

"I know, Daddy—you are the best father in the world, and I know I have only just got to wish for anything that money can buy, and I get it. Still . . . there are other things. No man ever looks at me; no one wants to take me to a dance or a theatre—except those hangers-on who are after your money."

You might have thought Margery was a woman of forty, but as a matter of fact, she was only thirty. Her complexion was dark and gave one the impression that it was frequently scrubbed with yellow soap; her nose had never been powdered since those days when, as an infant, she had been "finished off" with a giant puff after the morning bath. Her black hair was untidy and always seemed to be escaping from the possession of fortuitous hairpins. She was gruff, shy and awkward. One of those kind of women you couldn't possibly fall in love with; no one could ever have fallen in love with her. And it must be admitted that Margery had never had the remotest idea of falling in love with anybody.

And yet it must be confessed that she was not an ugly woman; she had good regular features, rather a nice nose and white gleaming teeth. Possibly it was her curious taste in clothes which made her appear such an odd figure. She dressed, habitually, in any old jumper, any old skirt, and any old hat. When her figure, which, as women acquaintances often remarked, was really an excellent one, was hidden by a straight, shapeless raincoat, the people of Salmonsbury might be pardoned for regarding her less as a woman than a human being who, somehow or other, had just escaped being a man.

EXCAVATION

Margery, from the vantage point of a steep slope on Lychpole Hill, witnessed the opening up of the mound. Operations were begun by cutting a trench across the centre of the earthwork. Soon the spades struck against rough-hewn stones set in a curious black mortar.

Upon examination, the stones proved to be the head of a circular stairway leading down to a subterranean chamber. The stairway was blocked with the accumulated rubble and earth of two thousand years. The archæologists

settled down to two hours' digging and Margery settled down to smoke a cigarette and read a novel.

After the shingle and gravel was cleared out of the well of the stairway the diggers found a deposit of black earth and earthenware pots of Roman date.

"Well, Margery!" said the Major, as he settled down beside her for a rest in between digging, "I knew something would happen to-day. That soil"—he pointed to a heap of black sandy earth —"is composed of ashes from the altar of the temple. There can be but little doubt that the barbaric practice of human sacrifice was performed in the temple." The Major's eyes shone excitedly. "To think that we may be on the verge of opening up a British Temple over two thousand years old!"

It was slow work digging out the earth in the subterranean chamber, and Margery, tired of reading, decided to wander along the terrace-way running along the side of Lychpole Hill. Suddenly she stopped dead, and remained as rigid as if she had just awakened from a nightmare.

"My sorrow!" she exclaimed. And, again, slowly, almost in a whisper: "My . . . sorrow!"

The exclamations had been called forth by something which she had seen bounding up the steps of the heathen temple. It was a black figure and yet rather an indistinct figure, and it had bounced away up the side of Lychpole Hill with amazing fleetness — with devilish fleetness.

But to her the most curious thing about the figure was the fact that the legs were covered with light brown fur. There was something about the motions of those furry legs which made Margery cover her eyes and run screaming to her father, who was just climbing out of the stairway.

"What in the world is the matter with you? What have you been doing? What have you seen?" the Major shouted.

"It was something which jumped out of the stairway before you came up . . . A figure like a man: but," Margery searched for a definition, "it wasn't a man. It was like a large monkey."

A word as to the nature of this "large monkey." He was of the regions of faerie—a goblin who had been imprisoned in the heathen temple. Of course, he was much older than the temple, for he had lived with tribes who, tens of thousands of years before, had hunted the hippopotamus and the great extinct elephants up and down the river valleys of England.

As soon as the archæologists had opened up the temple he had rushed up the steps, and raced over Lychpole Hill to the town of Salmonsbury. Here he had snatched an overcoat from a tailor's dummy and streaked along to Woolpit House, the residence of Major Pitt-Grimshaw. A few minutes later he was hiding in a cupboard in Margery's bedroom.

"A NICE RESPECTABLE GOBLIN"

"Who are you—and what do you want?" said Margery. She gazed at the figure in a horrid perplexity. She pulled the bedclothes over her, for any idea of getting out of bed and passing the figure was intolerable to her.

"I'm a goblin, miss," he mumbled. "But I'm a kind and respectable goblin. Please don't scream, miss."

He fell on his knees with a supplicating look on his small impish face.

Margery, at the words, lifted the sheet from her face and looked intently at the goblin.

"You came out of the heathen temple

this afternoon. You gave me a dreadful fright."

"Yes," said the goblin. "I've been locked up in that foul pit for two thousand years."

"But why don't you live with all the other goblins and demons?" asked Margery.

"It's like this, my lady. I'm one of the goblins who got left behind when our people fled from England ever so many years ago. Now nobody will own me. Neither my own people down below or the humans above the earth want me. What I want is sympathy and help. I want somebody to take me as a servant. That would change my condition for me, and I might gradually become a real human being. With a decent suit of clothes and a shave I could easily pass in a crowd. I don't look too bad in this overcoat—do I?"

Margery's heart was beating like a drum, but her sense of pity was stronger than her fear now that the goblin appeared so meek and mild.

"But I have a maid of my own and our household is over-staffed at present," said Margery kindly.

"Forget that I'm not a human, my lady," the goblin continued in a most beseeching voice. "Forget that I've got furry legs and do a brave and kind thing! Oh, do let me be your servant. I'm clever: so very clever. I can do all kinds of marvellous tricks. I can make you famous, envied, admired. I can embroider bedroom slippers or take you for a joy-ride on a rainbow."

"Indeed?" said Margery. "But Mr. . . ."

"My name is Hako, my lady."

"But, Hako," said Margery, her warm brown eyes turned on him, "can you make me beautiful? That's a test for you."

Hako blinked, and made a gesture with his furry arms. "But, my lady, you are beautiful," he said.

"Oh!" said Margery. "Now I know that you're a wicked goblin. No one in the world who was not a humbug would call me beautiful."

But it must be confessed that Margery's heart warmed a little to the goblin. No woman in the world can hear even a goblin say "You are beautiful" without feeling a thrill of satisfaction.

"I must think the matter over," she announced.

"Oh, my lady," cried Hako, "decide now. Don't leave me in suspense. Look! I'll show you what a clever servant I am. Say to me, 'Go'."

Margery said the word, and the goblin whisked round and vanished in thin air and his overcoat dropped on the floor.

"Hi! Hako . . . don't go . . ." cried Margery.

Hako flashed back again and stood on the hearth-rug.

"I'll engage you for a month on trial," said Margery. "You can commence your duties now. Provided your magic is satisfactory, you can have a home here for the rest of your—ah, existence. Now show me some of your best magic. Change me into a beautiful blonde cinema star."

"Ah, now you baffle me," said Hako. "I cannot transform human beings. That can only be done by fairies. But," he added, seeing that he had damped Margery's hopes of becoming a blonde beauty, "I am an adept at all trades and professions; I am cunning; I am swift; and I can become invisible and stay so for long periods."

"Well, how do you propose to help me? I'll leave it all to you."

HAIRDRESSER

"Well," said Hako, "I'm a perfect wonder at ladies' hairdressing—let me arrange your hair. When the Romans landed in Britain I worked as a ladies' hairdresser around the Roman Villas of Salmonsbury. There was not much that the Roman ladies did not know about

home beauty treatment—they had their skin tonics, creams, powders and lipsticks just as you have them to-day."

At that moment Hako vanished. He flashed like a silver arrow through walls and houses to a ladies' hairdressing establishment and returned swiftly with a full set of hairdresser's implements. Next moment he had bobbed, brushed, burnished, curled, waved and permed Margery's hair.

"There," said Hako, handing a looking-glass to her. "Look at yourself now!"

Margery looked and her reflection almost took her breath away. She burst forth with cries of surprise and admiration. Her hair looked impossibly beautiful.

"Oh, thank you, Hako. You are simply marvellous," she gasped.

"Just a little thing—you're welcome, I'm sure," mumbled Hako. "And if I might be allowed to say so—just a little of this Roman face-cream. I prepared it myself from snakes' liver and moon-beams. There! Now a touch of lipstick . . . Splendid!"

The glass was passed to Margery a second time.

"Oh, Hako!" she cried. "This is real magic—I'm not as beautiful as that. I must be dreaming."

Her voice held a new, uncontrollable quiver.

Up to this time nobody had wanted to marry Margery. Even her father's money did not attract anybody whom she looked upon with favour. The belle of the town was Millie Fane. Men swarmed around her like flies around a honey-pot. Therefore Millie was as much annoyed as surprised when Margery walked in the little local club—it was held over the Lido Picture Palace—and boldly flaunted her new-found beauty.

Hako had insisted on her buying a smart-tailored two-piece suit, a spotted shantung blouse in tobacco brown and white and brown tie shoes. And, oh, boy! did she look swell! Hako's Roman cream had worked wonders. As the skin food advertisements say, it had "bestowed the thrilling loveliness of youth" on her.

Margery sailed up to John Chorrington—whom it must be explained was both handsome and much chased by the ladies of the club—and said:

"Do buy me a cocktail, John. I've been told that when one feels in form, a cocktail puts one in top form. Funny, this will be the first time in my life I've ever tasted a cocktail."

For the first and only time on record did John Chorrington lose his natural grace of manner. For a perceptible instant he stood stock still and stared open-mouthed. . . .

Margery adroitly shepherded Chorrington into a corner of the cocktail-bar and soon they were seated on a divan chatting and laughing. Millie Fane had the chagrin to see Chorrington's politely bored face gradually lighting up with reawakened interest.

For the next few days Margery enjoyed a triumph. She was always the centre of the little coterie at the Lido Club. Men and women crowded round her. She found herself talking on all kinds of subjects with dash and assurance. All her pent-up emotions, longings, laughter of years burst forth like sparkling cascades in the sunlight. Chorrington, now never far away from her, was amazed to discover how sweet was her smile and how dazzling was the gleam of her strong white teeth. She had hardly ever ridden a horse, but now almost daily she was a dashing figure astride with some cavalier in attendance.

"I notice the ladies are playing the officers of the Loamshire Regiment at cricket," said Hako a few days later. "You must offer to play, my lady. You must hold your own in all sporting and social events."

"No—oh no, Hako," replied Margery quickly. "I'm a duffer at sports."

"Go and put your name down—I'll do the rest." Hako smiled a quiet

superior smile. "You just swipe at the ball and the invisible Hako will sock it for you."

LADY ATHLETE

Margery, rigged up in cricket flannels, drove up to the ground with the Major.

"Pinch me. Pinch me hard," Millie Fane whispered to Chorrington. "That Pitt-Grimshaw woman is going to have the cheek to play cricket. Why, she's about as agile as an elephant, and a duffer at tennis and any other outdoor sport."

But when Margery walked out to bat, the people of Salmonsbury beheld a Margery they had never seen before. It was a Margery in faultless white flannel blouse and trousers. Margery with smooth clear olive skin and shining black hair; Margery erect, proud, smiling, her strong face illuminated by eyes a-glitter with suppressed excitement. She faced the bowler with confidence and drove the first ball through the covers. Margery and her partner crossed twice.

There was a roar of appreciation from the lads and girls of Salmonsbury.

"Well hit, Miss!"

"Fluke!" said Millie Fane.

The next ball was a scorcher, and Margery did well to stop it. But the next delivery pitched a trifle short. She opened her shoulders and smacked the ball to the boundary.

"Hurrah!" The air was rent with cheering.

The game went on and so did Margery's hitting. She smacked the bowling all over the field, and it must be admitted, was blessed with astonishing good luck. On two occasions the ball came off the edge of her bat, and was nearly held in the slips. But fortune smiled on Margery, and her score rose merrily, until it stood at forty-nine.

There was a shout from the pavilion.

"Only one more for your half century —stick it!"

Margery looked round and discovered that the voice came from John Chorrington.

Margery went on batting, rather more recklessly now. She piled her score up to sixty-eight, the din of Salmonsbury cheers ringing in her ears every time she slogged the ball. At last, she lunged forward wildly, and there was an ominous clatter behind her.

The middle stump was flat!

It was a merry party of dancers that assembled in the Lido Club that evening to celebrate Margery's sensational début as a cricketer.

Margery smiled on Millie Fane:

"Hello, Millie darling. Pity you were bowled by the first ball—but Mr. Barnaby is a crafty bowler. But, dear, you're looking pale to-night—quite fagged you looked, I hope there's nothing the matter."

She turned round quickly, leaving Millie speechless with indignation, and as she did so John Chorrington took her arm:

"Come along Margery," he said, "and have a cocktail. Your batting was too magnificent for words. But why have you been keeping it so dark? Why did you make fools of all the rest of us?"

That night Margery went to bed, but she could not sleep. She felt an imposter. It worried her to think that she would be a failure without Hako's magic. Besides, she thought, only witches made agreements with sprites and goblins. And suppose Hako should run away and leave her. She could never face her friends in Salmonsbury without him.

She had a headache; such a headache: a thunder and lightning headache!

In the cold morning light, commonplace things crowded in on Margery, and our heroine found her visions fading. Hako's teachings were fantastic, dangerous. Before she had finished dressing, she was inclined to shun all these extravagant dreams and continue to keep to her straight, if extremely monotonous, path.

"THAT'S THE SPIRIT"

She picked up one of her frowsy skirts to put on: but she could not bring herself to wear the horrible and shapeless garment. She kicked it across the floor and jumped on it.

"That's the spirit!" grinned Hako, who suddenly appeared with a large box under his arm. He opened it and displayed a fascinating three-piece suit with striped jumper and big dashing bow.

"Accept this, my lady," Hako said. "I spent my last penny on it, the skirt is tailored for a heavenly fit. You will look a perfect angel in it."

"No, Hako," said Margery sadly, "don't tempt me any more. I can't go on with this pretence. I feel such an imposter. But that game of cricket was grand fun." Margery's eyes shone hungrily. "It was thrilling to be in the limelight for once and to be beautiful and brilliant and joyous."

Hako smiled and surveyed Margery with his head on one side, as he picked his pointed teeth with a spine from a blackthorn.

"You just tumble into that suit, my lady. You'll make a hit in that. Don't you worry your head about my magic."

"But I do worry," said Margery. Her voice was thick and low.

"There's no need to," answered Hako, "because it isn't magic. You see, there's no doubt you are beautiful, and no doubt you can play cricket."

"Hako, you little villain, are you trying to tell me that this new 'me' "—she pointed to her attractive reflection in the cheval glass—"is not all magic?"

Hako smiled and nodded his head.

Margery stared at him.

"Do you mean to say you didn't hit up those runs for me and do you mean to tell me you didn't change my hair and complexion by magic?"

"Yes, I do mean to tell you that, my lady." He chuckled. "I did not even go as far as the cricket-field with you, and as for that magical Roman complexion cream, I got that at Mr. Peppercorn's shop in High Street. It cost one shilling and a halfpenny."

"That's a relief," cried Margery.

With that, Hako vanished respectfully.

Margery carefully collected up all her mangey old jumpers and skirts and threw them out of her window. Attired in the new suit with striped jumper and dashing bow, she stood before the cheval-glass all of a-tremble, excited and bewildered.

A short while afterwards her maid, Eliza, came in with the bundle of clothes she had thrown out of the window.

"I found all your things on the lawn, ma'am. What shall I do with them?"

"Burn 'em," said Margery, as she flourished her lipstick.

Arachne

On the Road to the Valley of Blue Diamonds

by FREDERICK GRAVES

YOU want the whole story?"

"Yes. I have heard so many versions of the thing—all of which you say are mainly imaginary, the products of the mercurial minds of the reporters, who tried to get the real thing and were disappointed—that I really would like to have the true version. It must have been an extraordinary affair."

"Well, it was that all right. . . . I'll tell you, as you are so persistent; but be it on your own head. You have asked for it and you shall have it; but I have warned you it is nasty!"

Crane muttered something more or less incoherent about the credulity of the public, as he filled his pipe.

"Some of 'em will believe anything, but the funny thing is that here is a real live story, yet the few to whom I have given even the mere skeleton, smirk in such an irritating way I could knock their beastly heads off. They plainly don't believe a word of it."

But after a little more grumbling and subterranean moralising he got under way and thereafter I made no attempt to interrupt him. . . .

"As you know, certain little things leaked out—though I refused all interviews. (Lord! one chap was so persistent he even got at me in the bath! He went off a lot quicker than he came up! And, if I am any judge of life, he still bears the mark of the boot I sent after him!) Yes, a few details got out and they built up all sorts of queer tales on 'em. The *Daily Sun* produced the biggest lie of its flaming career in search of truth. But they none of 'em told the full and true story because I was the only poor devil who came back with the news. . . .

"My lecture at the Royal dealt only with the geological and biological results of the expedition. As you know we found no gold and as for the famous valley of diamonds that the natives have for generations told of—well, the reason we did not explore it lies in the tale I am about to tell you—and you will, I think, understand! . . .

"What my friends of Fleet Street would have made of the true story heaven only knows. I would probably have been fated till I busted or—have been lynched! . . .

"Now for it! You can keep it to yourself or make use of it. I'm off again—to Central America this time, as you know, next week, and don't care what happens now. Only—won't those chaps in Fleet Street yell if you do use it! My Gad, they'll slit your throat if they get at you! . . .

"Well, now I'll really start. . . ." Though he paused again to stretch out a languid hand for the glass of fire-water at his elbow, as though he felt he needed just a nip to fortify him in the recital. He imbibed slowly and thoughtfully. Feeling refreshed, presumably, he lay back and started in earnest.

"I have been in some funny places, deserts, forests, swamps, snows, and, believe me, there are still weird things to be found in this world. I have come across a few that they would never have believed at the Royal if I had

described them. But I think this was about the worst experience anyone could have.

"There were four of us you know, and we got up the Antoxyl river as far as we could into the borders of Peru. We had heard of the mysterious valley of blue diamonds that was said to lie high up in the rugged volcanic rocks and pinnacles that towered above the dense forest beyond the rushing cascades of the upper torrents that fell to and fed the Atoxyl, and eventually the Yavery, that runs to the Upper Amazon.

"After we left the boat, Manders, myself and our two Indians, we had to fairly cut our way step by step through the intense undergrowth of the jungle. It was slow work and the heat terrific. We could only do about a mile a day and it was uphill, over the roughest of volcanic tufa, broken and sharp as a razor.

"Overhead the dense forest; through gaps here and there the sun beat down and it was just like doing hard labour in an over-heated conservatory among a smother of tropical plants tied up with masses of toughest lianas. . . .

"Lad, I tell you there is much to be said for the civilisation we growl so much about at times! There have been moments when I would have given my life for a nip like this and a whiff of good 'baccy. As for the former—to have got drunk, dead drunk, dead indeed! But, however . . .

"In a way we had achieved the object of the expedition and for which the society sent us out—or at least found no boodle—we had proved that there was no gold in such amounts as would pay for working and transport from such an out-of-the-way part of the world. But it was that fairy legend of the valley of the blue diamonds that lured us on.

"We had braved the dangers of the rapids, the serpents, the pirrhanas in the water, the fevers, and even the terrible hostile tribes we had been warned against. We had one or two conflicts with spear heaving, arrow-shooting foes, but managed to survive these. But we went on and with every mile the going got worse. There was one little thing that helped us and gave a little hope—as we rose, but by bit, we got into a cooler atmosphere and, when we came to a gap in the jungle, we were able to get a breath of mountain air.

A GLIMPSE OF THE GOAL

Once we caught just a glimpse of the far-off sunlit crimson crags of the range towards which we were laboriously and very slowly working. There lay our goal and—what! Would we get there? Would we find the treasure? Would we return—with our lives, or would we leave our bones to bleach on those arid heights, as the natives had assured us others had done?"

"Indians had gone there, or tried to get to the peaks, but had never returned they said. They said a good deal more—unpleasant things that we pretended not to hear or just put down to native superstition; one thing struck Manders and myself as peculiarly horrible.

"I won't tell you—yet. We didn't believe it, but all the same it made a queer creepy impression on us both.

"But, oh Lord! I tell you I would never have believed such heat existed on earth. I have been lost in the Sahara—that was nothing to the stuffy suffocation of this mountain jungle! There are times when I wake up in the night in such a welter of sweat—pooh! . . .

"I began to worry about poor Manders, he kept getting a touch of fever and we had to stop for a time, though it was most important to get him on and higher into purer air. That

delayed us. The fever got its fangs into me also, and the quinine was nearly gone, and I began to wonder whether we were not just about done, and might as well lie down and die there as a bit farther on.

"Then Jo-Jo told us of a new and shorter path, though it was almost as precipitous as a church steeple.

"Suddenly, we were out of the forest and upon a high plateau that went sheer down on three sides to the boiling river that seemed a million miles below. Lord! how we squatted and inhaled the mountain air!

"All at once we felt as though we had come up to the surface from a submarine volcano or a fiery coal-mine, from hades in fact to heaven! We felt that there was such a thing after all as life, and that it was worth living. We could go on and conquer!

"And on we went, scrambling over that rough volcanic tufa towards the high cleft in the towering peaks before us. It was fairly cool up there, after the oven below, and the only thing that bothered us now was a curious unrest we could not fail to notice about our two bearers. The nearer we approached the mountains the more hesitant and uneasy they became.

"At the end of the first evening, as Manders and I lay watching the crimson glow on those strange peaks, Jo-Jo gradually made me acquainted, in his queer mixture of Araquaise, Spanish and English, that at the next camp they would reluctantly be compelled to leave us.

"They would, however, he ventured graciously to explain, wait for us at the foot of the pass. I argued a little, but it was useless I could see to try to move them.

"Their minds were fixed and both he and Pteroquia (of the rat's face) made it clear that there were strong and spiritual reasons why they could not be expected to penetrate the far mountains. Indeed, they hinted more or less directly, if delicately, that no reasonable being (much less a stupid white man and an Englishman), would ever dream of trying to force respectable Indians of their peculiar persuasion to go into a land that was forbidden by their gods, and the entrance to which would certainly be visited upon them (and very possibly their companions also) by the most appalling and quite unmentionable reprisals.

"So there it was, and the next night as we camped, as it seemed, quite close to the forbidding ramparts, the two faithful servitors were evidently making their preparations, not only for a sit-down, but, as Manders expressed it—a bunk! They had had enough of it and we were perfectly certain that as soon as our backs were turned they would retrace their steps. We could understand in a way, for it was quite evident they were not only uneasy under the shadow of the mountains, but in actual fear, since their presence so near to the gods (or whatever the evil powers were) had given them the jitters and they were itching to be off.

"Well, it would not so much matter. The stores were by now reduced to just what we could carry ourselves, and even if we lost them altogether the loss would not be serious; and at the worst we could find our way back to the river even if we just tumbled down! We would perhaps find an old canoe somewhere or manage to make a raft with bamboos and lianas. . . .

" 'I say, do you think we have lost the track?' Manders asked me once, as we paused next day on a curious ridge after leaving the camp and taking farewell of our bearers—who, we could see, were hard put to restrain their desire that we should get on quickly and give them the chance to bolt.

" 'We seem to be going down again.' "

" 'No, I think we are right. See! There is an opening in the cliffs!'

"It was a desolate burnt-up land, with no trace of any vegetation; even the desert lichens that seem able to

linger anywhere had been burned up as with a blast of flame at some remote age. After the luxuriant tropic jungle, it was strange indeed.

"But, curiously, there was one thing we noticed, and it had a curious affect on us both—one I cannot describe. With every step we took we noticed that there was one sign of life—the spider. An extraordinary number of these creatures seemed to be appearing from every stone and cranny, and to grow both in numbers and size as we went on.

"I have a dislike of spiders in spite of the fact that as a naturalist I have collected specimens of every kind of creature for the museums. And as for Manders—he is one of those people who get the creeps badly at the sight of one. But we went on, ever onwards.

"The mysterious mountains of the blue diamonds were in front, and we had come too far and risked and braved too many things to turn and funk the business. I wished at times we had had another companion or two. It was rather a lonely sort of job just the two of us. But we shuddered a good many times when we saw extra-sized gentlemen (or ladies) of the arachnoid order shoggling away to their crannies.

"I began to have some inkling as to the feelings of the respectable Jo-Jo and his pal. They knew a thing or two! I must confess I did not much relish the idea of camping in those parts, but as the light began to fail we found a bit of stony hollow that had a cave that seemed to be fairly free of the crawlers, and so we scraped some scrub and lit a small fire, boiled our coffee and munched our biscuit. There was a spring of water and that made up for much. We were burning with thirst and had been looking for one all day.

THE MONSTER

"Just as the light was going Manders roused me by uttering an exclamation that was startling in the great silence of that rocky place. I started up in alarm.

"He was raised on his elbow, staring hard at something; then he pointed with shaking finger towards the darker interior of the cavern. I stared hard, following the direction of his finger, and as my eyes became more accustomed to the gloom I saw there was a cleft in the rock, and protruding from the cleft something that moved and quivered.

"'Lord save us! What is it?' I gasped. Manders did not answer, but his lips made a curious sound that seemed to indicate intense aversion, mingled with disgust.

"As I watched another object came down and I could see then that the two things were the long hairy legs of some monstrous creature of the spider tribe. But—that could not be a spider! It must be a huge land crab! Yet, a moment later, as we watched, spell-bound and fascinated, there was another movement and part of the beastly creature's body came into view, and poor as the light was, we could see it was a giant spider.

"'Heavens! What an appalling brute!' Manders hissed. 'What are we to do? Shoot it—or lie and be devoured?'

"As we gazed the creature suddenly moved forward and at such a rate it seemed to be upon us with a bound. Instinctively I must, without knowing it, have had my revolver in my hand and I fired. What happened, beyond the fact that we evidently settled the thing, I do not know. We lost no time in getting outside the cave, and we made another little fire in the open and stayed there, though neither of us got any sleep, and we were pretty glad to see the red of the dawn.

"We entered the cave later, when the light was good and took a look at what was left of the victim. But we soon emerged into the open again, sickened, for the thing we had, probably luckily

for us, slain, was a gigantic king spider as big as a mastiff.

"After that we went on in a somewhat sombre and distinctly sobered mind. I need hardly say we did not sing blithely to the morn. But we were going to see the business through. We had not come all that way to turn and go back without some idea regarding those blue diamonds. And we were close to the last cliffs now, in which we could see a great rift that must be the fabulous valley.

"It was queer work edging round that slope to the rift. We had come right out again over the torrent, a sheer drop to the river.

"'Nice spot for a dive!' Manders, with grim humour, muttered once as he peered down, then drew carefully back.

"Once we came upon the remains of a human skeleton. Probably there was some truth in the tale Jo-Jo had told one night—I supposed in order to frighten us—that the people who ventured into yonder mountains were bitten by some terrible and vengeful gods and died in awful agony. Had this adventurer been bitten by one of the spiders? Perhaps, for we came on two more skeletons later.

"But we knew we were nearing our goal. Yonder lay the rift we sought, and it could not be more than a few miles to reach it, only that the going was so toilsome and tortuous over those broken slabs of rock.

"Towards evening the sky became overcast, and it seemed as though one of the terrible thunderstorms threatened, so that we began to keep an eye open for a likely shelter. Lightning would be unpleasant in that rocky neighbourhood, with its streaks of glistening pyrites here and there.

"We were entering a rocky defile, and we noticed a great increase in the spiders; evidently we were entering their kingdom, and I thought to myself, 'if these pests grow much bigger as we go on, and more numerous, goodness knows what is to become of us!' One could scarcely help treading them underfoot, and they scuttled away on all sides. Once or twice we caught sight of such monsters as made us wince and pause. All at once a gasping cry came from Manders, who was toiling along behind me.

"Oh, for pity sake let us turn back and get away from this accursed place!" I turned round and saw that he was struggling with what appeared to be a cord stretched across his path, then I saw that there were many of them all round, like a maze of telephone wires. At the same moment I tripped over one of the cords and it took me some seconds to extricate myself from the ropy, sticky, elastic thing.

"They were stretched from rock to rock and glancing round I saw that I had only just escaped walking blindly into a monster web. I got Manders free, and we stood panting and looking round, when we saw that the webs were everywhere. Some of the cords were so long they stretched right out of sight, and they must have acted as warners and telephones to the inhabitants of that land of terrors, for the spiders began to appear in greater numbers from all quarters.

"The next moment I felt something on my face and tore at it. I had gone headlong, as I turned to move on, into a mass of web.

"'Look at that!' Manders cried, at the same time as he pointed to an immense and perfect web that covered a great chasm. 'Suppose we got into a thing like that! We would never get out again. Oh, we cannot go on! We must get back somehow!'

"It was at that moment, as we paused again, that glancing up I caught sight of a tremendous sheet of web, just seen in the gloom that was settling round us. A flash of lightning lit up the scene, and then I saw that a monster spider was sitting and swaying gently in the middle of the thing. Floating filaments filled the air and it was becoming difficult to breathe.

TRAGEDY

"What happened after that I hardly know. It was all too horrible. The storm burst and the place was all but in darkness, except when the vivid flashes came. I think for some moments we plunged hither and thither, almost unconscious of what we were doing beyond the one all-mastering desire to get out of that terrible place somehow, anyhow, anywhere.

"I trod on something horny that slid from under my feet and nearly threw me down, and at the same time I was conscious of a cry from my companion. I searched the gloom, but could not see him. I had the feeling that we were now indeed lost, and in a region of appalling horror; that the tragedy was fast working to its dread climax. The cry came again and it was heart-rending.

"Then came a flash and I caught sight of a paralysing spectacle and realised that Manders was caught in one of the giant webs, struggling desperately to free himself, and that a monster spider was advancing upon him . . .

"What then? I really hardly know, but that I fired, frantically, recklessly. I was out of my senses with fright and horror. . . . God knows if I killed Manders. If I did it was perhaps for the best, for there was no chance of rescue from that appalling thing that closed upon him. Perhaps it is a terrible thing to say, but I can only hope one of my mad shots did for the two of them. . . .

Then it seemed that hell was let loose. In the almost continuous flickers of the lightning I saw that the enemy seemed to be pouring out upon me from every quarter. Mad with horror, I turned and fled—anywhere, stumbling over the creatures and the rocks, I caught a mad vision of millions of scrambling hairy legs and bodies, some of them monstrous, and how I missed being seized and dragged down I cannot imagine.

"Millions of dark bodies shambling about and bobbing up and down, and a myriad of horrible gleaming eyes. I appeared to be plunging through a world of clinging webs and restraining strands, and all at once as a great flash came, I realised I was on the brink of the fearful precipice that hung at a great altitude above the gorge where the river ran about a mile below. . . . I could not stop my headlong rush, and there was the racing army at my heels. Behind the horrors, before me the abyss. . . .

"It seemed to me that I fell through an eternity of time and space, and at length there came the terrific plunge into an icy flood. . . .

"No good asking me what happened after that. I suppose I must have risen to the surface in a pool below the falls and caught at same overhanging liana. Anyway I must have managed to pull myself ashore, and there I lay more or less unconscious till I came round in the first light of the dawn, to find myself baking and sweltering in the blaze of the sun on a sandbank and with my clothing dry as a bone.

"I stumbled later on a derelict dug-out canoe, and managed to paddle it down the rapids to quieter water.

"Eventually, I struck a native village and, fortunately for me, they were peaceful and kindly Indians, who fed me and directed me through the jungle to the main stream, where I was provided with a log boat.

"Yes, I got to the coast on a Portuguese river tramp and—home!

"There! You have got the tale now. But you needn't believe a word of it. Probably you won't. Please yourself!"

The Psychic Typewriter

A Manifestation of Ghostly Detection

by JOHN WEST

"FROM times immemorial, the occult, or what we mere humans with our finite intelligence term the supernatural (simply because it is above or beyond the natural scope of our comprehensions) has had its partisans. Some have been earnest seekers after knowledge, others simply idly curious. Yet another group have had some knowledge suddenly thrust into their consciousness following close upon the loss of some relative or by some unusual occurrence which has come into violent conflict with their ready-made concepts of life and our connections with mere physical laws.

"Often in this way, individuals who have previously b e e n extremely sceptical of any ideas which were not entirely materialistic, have been literally forced to admit the existence of other intelligences amongst them, and to accept, even against the weight of normal scientific explanation, phenomena explainable only by the application of some law or combination of laws at present outside the scope of our ordinary reasoning powers."

So spoke Dr. Young, who had been drawn into a discussion on vibrations, a discussion arising out of a chance remark concerning a particularly good wireless programme. Young, a keen psychologist, spoke from the depths of a high-backed leather arm-chair, where he sprawled before the large and ornate fireplace of a club in the heart of the West End. The month was November, and the weather had contributed to the universal desire to dine leisurely and idle away an evening instead of rushing off to a theatre.

Dr. Young's fellow-clubmen were three, who, up to this point, had listened more or less intently to what was being said. First, the Rev. James Storm, a modern young man, always ready to listen to and examine new theories, and not too dogmatic about the principles which he had been expected to accept without question at his theological College. In the corner, ever a good listener, was a distinguished member of Scotland Yard, usually very taciturn concerning his personal activities at the Yard.

The fourth member of this group was Sir Sirgwishar Presad, a regular Hindu visitor to town in connection with his shipping business in Bombay in particular, and the Far East in general. Sir Sirgwishar was a wealthy man, came of a high and noble family and was accepted in England by virtue of his breeding and his standing in India. He was a very popular member of the club, his likeable personality and his charming graciousness endearing him to all with whom he came in contact. He it was who interrupted the doctor

at this point, and asked, smiling in his most disarming manner:

"And what connection has that with vibrations?"

Young smiled, flicked the ash from his cigar, and continued.

"Why, the Psychic investigator will tell us that all of these so-called phenomena can be explained when we know sufficient about vibrations and wave-lengths. He will explain that different rates of vibration give rise to different wave-lengths, and will use as an illustration the modern wireless receiving set. Here, by the simple process of turning a knob we can select a particular wave-length and invisibly connect ourselves with a particular station.

"Not many years ago, such means of communication would have been deemed impossible, simply because man's knowledge of the ether, of light and electrical vibrations, and of means of harnessing these vibrations to practical uses, was not sufficiently advanced. Vibrations in the ether have a range which is comparable with the range of pitch represented by a piano keyboard, but having no fixed boundary at either the bass or treble end.

"Human beings can pick up sounds belonging to the centre portion of the range of sounds, animals can respond to sounds in the higher portion of the scale, sounds completely inaudible to the human ear. Finally a stage is reached when neither humans nor animals can hear the higher or finer vibrations without a 'medium,' which can receive them and transform or reduce them to a level at which the human ear can comprehend."

Dr. Young reached for his glass, as our Hindu friend remarked:

"Very interesting. I had no idea you had a leaning towards the psychic."

The other two confessed that they invariably found the subject fascinating, but they had never really given psychic matter any serious consideration, simply because they had so little knowledge of it, and because they knew of no one competent to advise. And if the truth were told, perhaps their main and real reason was that they had been afraid of being laughed at.

THE OCCULT CLUB

That evening saw the birth of a new society to which the founders—our four bachelor clubmen—gave the name, "The Society for the Investigation into Matters pertaining to the Occult." A long and cumbersome name, but it was agreed upon by all after the doctor had given his view that a title, like a diagnosis, should be self-explanatory, though lengthy.

In due course arrangements were made for a suitable place in which to hold meetings and investigations. A room was taken, on the doctor's recommendation, immediately above his consulting-room in Harley Street. It was a large airy room, where they were certain to be undisturbed by noise or by any outside interference whatever. In this room would be made investigations of a critical scientific psychic nature in the presence of tried and reputable mediums who were world-famed for their physical manifestations whilst under condition which eliminated the slightest possibility of fraud or charlatanism.

Several weekly meetings had already been held when the Secretary of this new society, Dr. Young, was able to inform his confréres, with no little pride, that he had obtained the services of a medium, a Hungarian, Holtz by name, who had been tested under every conceivable condition, and whose manifestations were of such a nature, and carried with them such conviction, that they could not be explained unless it were admitted that he was assisted by "supernatural" powers which were manifested through him.

The appointed evening arrived. The members, whose numbers had by now increased to twelve, were all assembled,

many of them in eager anticipation of the evening's proceedings. When Holtz arrived, he was introduced to the members who found in him a shy, sallow-looking individual, of unpleasing manner, but in whose eyes burned some inward fire, the fire of the leader, the prophet, the fanatic. But yet he was shy, and unassuming. Altogether a rather unusual type.

All doors and windows were locked, bolted and then sealed, to prevent the entrance or exit of any person, and to prove that the whole proceedings were above all suspicion. The lights were extinguished with the exception of one bulb, which gave a red glow, just sufficiently strong enough to enable all to see.

The sitters then took their places, sitting so as to form three parts of a circle, the remaining portion of the circle being occupied by the medium, who lay on a mattress in front of a small cabinet-like arrangement, which was covered with black cloth. This arrangement was agreed upon as simple, and was critically examined by each member after the medium's legs and arms had been tied and sealed.

Very soon the medium appeared to lose normal consciousness, his eyes closed, his body relaxed. Each man there could hear his watch ticking in his waistcoat-pocket, and could feel the silence, breathe the silence, that had fallen on the small assembly, which gazed with rapt attention, and a keen expectancy on the medium before them.

Minutes passed, the medium quivered slightly, his lips trembled perceptibly, and simultaneously each heard the sound as of a sudden rush of wind, and felt the sensation as of a momentary cold breeze emanating from the direction of the cabinet, and was conscious of a prickling sensation in his scalp, as though his hair was standing on end. The lips of the medium moved more, and simultaneously with the words "Good evening, gentlemen," came the gradual appearance of a wraith-like figure from the neighbourhood of the cabinet.

The sitters gazed with still more rapt attention, their hands linked one with the other for the joint purpose of conserving and maintaining the power which emanated from each individually, and which was drawn upon and employed by the psychic phenomena now appearing in front of them, and at the same time eliminating all possibility of the perpetration of any fraud among themselves.

Here was a group of men, enlightened individuals, each in his own particular sphere well above the average, now critically examining the possibility of proof of supernatural happenings, and if such occurred, ready to search for reasons and explanations which could account for such phenomena and prepared to use such information, if necessary, for the benefit of humanity in general.

They had agreed beforehand that Dr. Young should take charge of proceedings, once the seance had commenced, for he had much experience in these matters, and had explained on previous occasions that fooling with a medium in a trance, or an attempt to interfere forcibly with an apparition, might have extremely serious effects upon, or even result in the permanent injury or death of the medium.

THE APPARITION

As the assembly continued to stare, the apparition slowly became clearer and gradually began to take recognisable shape. More than one member felt beads of sweat forming on his forehead as the wraith became more and more distinct and finally took the shape of an extremely beautiful woman, who began to speak to them in English, in a voice obviously cultured and in striking contrast with that of the medium, who spoke with a markedly foreign accent,

and had a none too fluent delivery.

"Gentlemen," she said, "I am pleased to be able to meet so august an assembly of enlightened minds and of such diverse interest, enquiring into matters which are really so simple of explanation, but which, on account of the materialistic outlook of modern civilisation, you find so difficult. No doubt you wish me to give you some proof of the continuation of life after death, some practical application of the laws governing apports, materialisations, de-materialisations, etc.

"Then be patient with me and continue to radiate the ectoplasm which exudes from you all as individuals, and concentrate sympathetically on your medium."

The doctor said, and it relieved many of those present to hear his reassuring voice, that he welcomed so charming an intelligence and she had his solemn avowal that the members would contribute individually and collectively their share towards the success of any experiment which she might care to perform.

At this the apparition said:

"I am going to leave you with a surprise, with puzzled minds, and a subject for discussion when next you meet at dinner at your club."

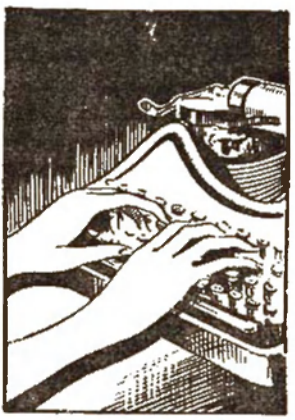
It should be explained at this juncture that all the members of the society were also long-standing members of the club, with the exception of the brilliant criminologist, Mr. Douglas Sharp who, of recent months, had become a fairly regular diner at the club, and was fast becoming an accepted member of this exceptional and talented gathering.

"To continue," said the apparition, "you are seated on the first floor of a house in Harley Street, immediately above the rooms occupied by your illustrious leader, Dr. Young. Below you, is his office. On one of the desks is a typewriter used by his lady typist and secretary, Miss Frances Grant. As an example of dematerialisation I will produce that typewriter, without opening window or door, and without breaking the seals which you have put on them or on your medium."

"Your continued concentration, gentlemen, please," begged Dr. Young, who realised that in an experiment of this nature, where an intelligence was to leave the medium at such a distance, greater maintained power and strength would be required for the successful performance of the experiment.

Again the atmosphere became tense and as though electrified, again the sitters felt that rush of cold air which they had experienced when the wraith had at first appeared before them, and now she seemed to vanish into the wall on the right of the sitters, to melt into it, to be absorbed by it, as they watched. In a very few seconds she re-appeared, indistinctly at first and then more and more distinctly, until they saw her as she had previously appeared, now placing a typewriter on a table near the window, some six feet or more away from the cabinet from which she had originally appeared.

THE WRAITH EXPLAINS



She turned to the amazed sitters, many of whom imagined that they must have been hypnotised en masse.

"No, gentlemen," she began, "you have not been hypnotised. The explana-

tion is simple, and I must give it quickly, my time is almost up, the power is giving out and your medium has suffered an extremely intense strain.

"When we pass from your earth to the next sphere, we merely discard our physical bodies. The spirit or astral body continues its existence free from its earthly limitations, untrammelled by the flesh. Time and space, in your earthly concepts, cease to exist. To walls, doors, windows, to all earthly matter, we are indifferent, and it was, therefore, no difficult task for me to pass from your presence into the room below.

"My real task, which I could only accomplish with your help, by using the ectoplastic power which you are exuding from your bodies together with that from the medium, and by the assistance of my unseen helpers who always accompany me on these experiments, was to de-materialise the typewriter.

"This was done, and I brought it through the wall, into this room, and placed it on this table, after it had been scientifically materialised by my friend here, an old and eminent scientist who passed on some sixty years ago. My friend here, Dr. Jacobsen, has continued his scientific researches in the spirit world, and it is really he, who is behind what may appear to you as a very wonderful experiment.

"You, gentlemen, only saw the typewriter after we had materialised it again, and you now behold it clearly on this table. To complete my experiment, I will type you a message, which you may like to keep as a record of this experiment."

The fair apparition did so, and turning to the sitters said:

"I must go now, and wish you on behalf of my unseen helpers and myself every good wish for the success of your psychic investigations. Perhaps, Dr. Young will arrange for the typewriter to be taken downstairs after you have examined it and the message I have typed on the paper."

So saying, gradually she began to disappear from view. The effect was a gradual fading, the clear-cut features and form grew fainter and fainter until they finally had no existence. As we still heard the words of her charming farewell speech, words which seemed to remain in our consciousness long after they bad been spoken, we began to realise that the gripping tension of the last forty minutes, had lessened, and that our wonderful medium, who in the spirit of the pioneer had allowed his body to be used for our benefit, was gradually gaining consciousness.

Dr. Young asked us to keep our seats until the medium had completely regained his normality.

"Ah!" he said, on recovering, "I hope, gentlemen, your experiment was a success."

"Indeed it was," said the doctor, "come and examine this typewriter and the message it contains."

THE GHOSTLY TYPESCRIPT

Full lights were switched on again and the experimenters, without exception, crowded round, and gazed with astonishment at what the paper contained.

"Missie Grant Sahiba—Salaam!
Khubadar! Khubadar! Khubadar!
Dactar Young Sahib Ki naukri Ko mat
chor-la Khuda Ko su bandabust bilkul saf hain, aur is wasti, isi tarah, uske barl mehrbani say, Ap kep as a-jatay hain."

"Well, what do you make of that?" asked the Rev. James Storm. "I can make out your name, Young, and that of your secretary Miss Grant, but the rest of it conveys nothing to me. What about you, Sir Sirgwishar, is it some Indian tongue about which you can enlighten us?"

Sir Sirgwishar smiled, shrugged his

shoulders, and turned to Douglas Sharp:

"Looks more like a message in code to me. Perhaps our friend from Scotland Yard will be able to translate it for us."

Douglas Sharp smiled in return and said nothing. No one expected him to reply to a question which everyone took as being merely facetious.

However, as no one, that night, could or would decipher the message, it was decided to close the meeting and release the medium, who was profusely thanked for his self-sacrifice, through which such an interesting experiment had been made possible. It was agreed to leave the interpretation of the message to some future occasion, and each individual took a copy, hoping to be able to decipher the message at his leisure. The original was, of course, preserved as a permanent record of the society's psychic researches.

A week passed, and by arrangement, eleven of the twelve members met one evening at their club, where, round a cosy fire, amid the clinking of glasses and the odour of cigars, the discussion commenced.

One by one they admitted their inability to decipher the message, and two members even went so far as to voice the opinion that the message was a mere jumble and had no meaning. At last, Douglas Sharp, the criminologist spoke:

"I think I can decipher the message, although I must admit it has occasioned me considerable serious thought and concern as to where my official obligations to the service start and end.

"You will remember that each of us, on joining this society, gave his unqualified assurance that should any information of a secret or confidential nature come to light during our investigations, whether it concerned a member's private life or his official position, then that information should be held secret and kept secret for all time, unless the member concerned released his confréres from their pledge.

"You will remember also, that while you were all eagerly scrutinising the message on the typewriter, I said very little. I took a copy like the rest of you, but had deciphered the message already. Why I did not disclose the matter to you immediately, will be evident when you have heard the whole of my story.

"You know, of course, that I am engaged in criminal investigation work, after having served for some years in a similar capacity out East, where the rigours of the tropical climate forced me to apply for a transfer to London. Therefore, some of the details of my investigations must remain secret. However, I recognised the script on the typewriter as none other than Urdu, the universal language of India, and commonly known as Hindustani, but written phonetically in English characters."

Young interrupted:

"What a pity Sir Sirgwishar is not with us to-night. This would have interested him. But—wouldn't he be able to read the message? I distinctly remember his saying it conveyed nothing to him. What do you make of that, Sharp?"

"That occurred to me immediately I read the message," replied Sharp. "I glanced towards Sir Sirgwishar, perceived him change colour, and observed the effort it caused him to produce his usual gracious smile when someone asked his opinion of the message. That set me thinking, and I deemed it wise to remain silent for a time.

"To-night, however, I can give you the gist of the message, as no harm can possibly come of the information being made public."

He passed across to his hearers a slip of paper from his notebook, on which was written the message copied from the typewritten sheet on the night of the seance. Underneath was a rough translation.

"Miss Grant. Greetings.
Beware! Beware! Beware!
Do not leave Dr. Young's service
All things are clear to God, and for
this reason in His great mercy, He approaches
you in this way."

Sharp continued:

"For several months now, good-looking British girls have been accepting secretarial posts abroad, and the relatives of four of them have had no word from them after the first month or two. Scotland Yard, in conjunction with the overseas police, have been investigating the cause of their disappearance, but were unable to make an arrest, because they lacked the one link in an otherwise continuous chain of incriminating evidence, a link made more difficult to forge because of the wealth of the individual suspected of being behind the affair."

"And what has Miss Grant to do with all this?" enquired the Rev. James Storm.

"Just this. She was to have been the next victim and had already thought of leaving Dr. Young's service. I interviewed her, and under promise of strict secrecy, was able to obtain valuable information, information sufficient for the Yard to prepare a complete chain of evidence, and at the same time was able to warn Miss Grant of the dangerous steps she had almost taken.

"I have since had another sitting with a famous woman medium, who was able to put me in touch with our fair visitor of last week. She told me her name, and that she was the sister of one of the missing secretaries.

"And where does Sir Sirgwishar come into this story?" asked Dr. Young.

"My men traced various clues, your secretary was able to help, and, gentlemen—Sir Sirgwishar shot himself this morning!"

The Tower of the Forty Companions

A Tale of Near Eastern Magic

by R. THURSTON HOPKINS

THE ancient town of Jaffa, still encircled by its ruined walls, is built like an amphitheatre, on the side of a hill which overlooks an eternally lilac and luke-warm sea from the height of a hundred and fifty feet. The streets are tortuous, and entangled, and the old houses are piled platform fashion and in disorder on the side of the hill.

As no gold is to be found in the soil, and any landing is rather dangerous, as the small harbour is obstructed by a line of breakers, few Europeans find their way there and the natives live a life of undisturbed idleness.

Sometimes a misguided European will come and try his hand at orange growing, only to find that the natives have a certain magic in the way they cultivate this fruit, which baffles any attempt at competition. Now and again a traveller will stay a day or so there on his way to Jerusalem. Sometimes an expedition will poke about the ruined mosques and churches for months at a time.

All those who tarry a while at Jaffa put up at the house of Sayyid Musjid, who speaks good English, and is the owner of a manufactory which turns out cheap and showy Oriental goods and sham curious for the bazaars of Cairo and Alexandria. He lives in a large and rambling house in a street euphemistically called "The Way of Pearls"; his windows are furnished with real glass, and a gramophone, six kitchen chairs and a large refectory table (looted in the past from a convent) adorn his best room.

The natives call him Pasha. He looks upon himself as a European, has put all the sinister manners and customs of the Moslem behind him, and drinks whisky or any of the native spirits, such as *araki* or *zebib,* in long measure. He is also one of the biggest rascals in the town.

Once he had a daughter called Rahlo.

Her mother was a Persian, and it was Sayyid's custom to think of Rahlo as coming down through the centuries with the blood of the Persian Magi. The Persian girl's voice is the softest, sweetest voice in the world, and Rahlo's voice was like that.

Her eyes were like the eyes of a gazelle, and she wore her hair in two splendid braids—fine and silken it was, and blacker than the night of affliction. Yes, Sayyid was very proud of Rahlo—proud of her white skin and gentle manners. His love for this lissom girl, with her drowsy eyes, was the one happy and bright page in his life.

Her mother died when Rahlo was quite a small child, and later on she was sent to school at Cairo. Cairo was the London of Rahlo's young imagination. She had often and often looked at the views of it on the picture-postcards which mouldered in the window of the cigarette-maker's shop next door. She had learned from the booab (door-keeper) of the Djamia el Khadra mosque of its gay life; of its dances, theatres, and grand hotels.

It was all this liveliness—the variety of nationalities, the living diorama formed by the brilliant and ever-shifting crowd where the East shakes hands with the West that attracted her. Dreams of European girl friends—perhaps boy friends, too!—of moonlight picnics to the Pyramids, of Paris dresses, of still, drowsy evenings on Nile pleasure-boats, floated through her little head.

In the East girls arrive at maturity with a suddenness which the Western mind can hardly understand. Like the great wine-coloured flowers which rioted in the gardens of Jaffa, the girls budded, were full blooms, and faded all too swiftly. Their transition from childhood to womanhood was so rapid that there was little chance of their minds ever coming to any state of maturity at all.

Rahlo was only sixteen, but she was not a bit sorry to leave her father—she was glad to leave behind the crumbling house and the rose-coloured roofs of Jaffa. When she was safe on board the steamer for Alexandria she watched the terraces of ancient houses and luxuriant orange-groves fade away with a passionate joy and a wild beating of heart. Sayyid Musjid and his curio manufactory soon slipped from her mind too, though the old fellow had shed real tears for her from the harbour.

They were perhaps the only genuine tears he had shed since his childhood—it is true he often wept over his business transactions, but such tears were only spurious; they were pumped up to soften the heart of the person he was dealing with.

THE BRAIN SPECIALIST

About three years after this Rahlo returned to her father's house, with her education completed, but the teachings of the school at Cairo had made few inroads into the labyrinthian ways of her barbaric soul. She now dressed her hair in the manner of the Cairo dancing girls—cut short and smoothed down, with heavy gold earrings. She was wearing short silk skirts, gossamer silk stockings and coquettish little high-heeled shoes with turquoise studded buckles, and she had been to a dance at the Semiramis hotel, had flirted with officers of the Egyptian Army and bank clerks, and had encountered all manner of bohemian flotsam and jetsam.

Amongst the passengers on the boat there was one individual who interested her very much. He had come on board at Alexandria. He was a man of about

thirty-five, tall, with broad shoulders, rather pale, with clean-cut features and rather full lips.

Rahlo had watched him on deck and in saloon, and on inquiry had discovered his name to be Hardacre. But Rahlo did not discover that this man was the great Dr. Ralph Hardacre, who, as everybody knows, was looked upon at one time as the supreme authority on the functions and disorders of the brain. His vast fund of special knowledge of the occult in relation to mental trouble had earned for him a high place in the world of science and a considerable fortune.

But when still quite a young man he had given up seeing people in any professional capacity, and had become detached from the everyday world. When he spoke to people it had seemed that there was an actual contact. As one of his old friends had said, he had looked out on life through a window; he conversed and listened and mixed with other people, but he sat behind that window like a sphinx.

Then he disappeared. Without warning and for no imaginable reason, in his early manhood at the height of his career he had left his house and laboratory and disappeared. Perhaps, in groping in that dim land of horror, where madness, Satanism and demoniacal possession lurked, his own mind had become unhinged. Who knows? So much then of Hardacre's past.

Hour after hour and all day long Hardacre would sit in a deck-chair, poring over some yellow and faded parchments. If his head was not down on the parchment, his eyes were fixed on the horizon in a vacant, apathetic stare. Rahlo had seen her father wearing the same fixed look after he had smoked too many hashish cigarettes.

The night after they had left Alexandria, Rahlo had gone up forward to smoke a cigarette, for she was a true Oriental in such habits. There she found Hardacre sitting on a coil of rope, his eyes fixed in a glassy stare, his long thin hands clasped over his knees, and an opium pipe by his side.

Rahlo stumbled over him in the darkness, and murmured a hasty apology. Hardacre had looked up at her with his grave grey eyes, but said nothing; then he had fallen forward in a huddled attitude. She spoke to him once or twice, and on receiving no answer, caught his arm and shook him violently.

She found that he was in a semi-comatose condition, and without a word she put her arm round him and half-dragged him to his feet, and with the help of a sailor who came up they took him along the dark side of the deck to his own cabin, where he was placed on his bunk. The sailor had not seen the opium pipe, for Rahlo had hidden it before he came up, and at the first opportunity had thrown it into he sea.

Rahlo knew nothing of "Mrs. Grundy," the guardian angel of the British matron, so after the sailor had left the cabin she closed the door and sat down with a cigarette between her lips to watch her unconscious derelict —for a derelict he was on the uncharted seas of opium.

Once when she leaned over the side of the bunk she kicked against something on the floor, and on picking it up found it was a bundle of documents in Arabic characters, which must have fallen from the man's pocket.

She turned over some of the faded pages, and of a sudden her eyes rested on her father's name written in some marginal notes. The texts of the document was written in ornate Arabic characters of a time long gone by, and she was unable to decipher it, but the notes were in modern Arabic, giving positions and particulars of chapels and ruins of the Crusaders up and down Palestine and Syria, also the names of various hotels in the towns. It was in the last list that her father's name was mentioned.

Some of the notes referred to a "tall

tower" and buried treasure—the treasure of Ram-allah. No doubt the man was an archæologist hunting for some legendary treasure buried by the Crusaders. Year after year such men came to Jaffa, making it their headquarters for expeditions to the buried cities in the desert regions.

An hour later the man turned over uneasily and opened his eyes, he stretched out both hands before him, carefully at first, as though he was groping in the dark for some object. Rahlo placed the parchments on a side table, and went and stood beside him.

Hardacre stared at her in a dazed way for some moments, and then he sat up. With a certain unaffected courtesy of gesture he waved Rahlo to be seated. There was a quiet smile on his lips, which were inclined to a generous Greek fullness.

"I'm awfully sorry this has happened," he said, speaking in a low weary voice. "Why did you trouble about me?"

Rahlo was rather agreeably surprised when he repeated the last question in good Arabic.

"Why did I bring you here?" she said. "In the first place because it is a foolishness for a man exhausted by the use of drugs to sleep on deck all night. In the second place you would have been robbed by the natives. Now just attend, lie down again, and I will go and get you some coffee."

Hardacre slid back on his pillow with a deep sigh, watching Rahlo with the leaden eyes of a tired child.

Rahlo soon returned with the coffee, and when he had finished the black, hot mixture, with much spluttering, she pulled him on his feet, and opening the door made him walk with her on to the deck.

"Take my arm, and walk some sense into that twilight brain of yours," she said; and so for an hour this strangely met couple tramped up and down in the bright Syrian starlight, Rahlo's tongue lashing him with bitter words for his weakness in smoking opium, Hardacre, stepping like a sleep-walker, whimpering like a child, and saying opium was the "divine spark," and that "he could not face things without it."

CRUSADER'S TREASURE

That was some weeks ago, and since then Hardacre and the girl had been friendly. Rahlo had taken the opium from him, and now he was staying at her father's house. But he puzzled them very much.

He had the wildest and most extravagant ideas about a treasure hidden by the Western Crusaders, and had been wandering about the country for some years with his bundle of parchments, some of which dealt with the Templars and Latin Churches in Palestine. It was a mixed bundle of documents, and the languages over which he spent so many hours, varied from the Arabic dialect of Aramanean character, and Syriac, to the ancient Norman French of the Knights.

Hardacre had some curious ideas that he could divine the treasure by some psychic power he possessed.

"You see," he explained to Rahlo. "I have always been psychic since childhood. I've always known things about people without being told, and found lost things intuitively. Some people solve a problem by the process of reasoning, but I arrive at the solution by psychic perception."

"Certainly this man is mad," said Sayyid to himself. However, he was a blessing and a godsend to the old merchant, for he paid him well for his food and quarters, and gave him many good suggestions for the manufacture

of marketable antiques. Besides, Hardacre would squat with him on the Turkey rugs and drink all manner of Oriental drinks, and sometimes when Rahlo was out they would smoke *hashish*.

Sayyid would relate stories which rolled in crescendos of wickedness. When he told them the blue smoke from their cigarettes seemed to drift up in evil shapes, and the air seemed full of evil spirits. The devil had been a sulky shadowy fellow to Hardacre in days past; but in the front room at Sayyid's he paraded before him in a tarbrush and tortoiseshell-rimmed spectacles instead of the usual horns and hoofs. A lively, truculent fellow was the devil, indeed!

In the evenings the great German oil-lamps were lit in the front room, and Rahlo reigned there supreme. In her flimsy blouse she looked as cool and fresh as the great white flowers of the creeper which nodded in at the open windows.

Hardacre would sit staring at her. He thought he had never seen anything so barbarically beautiful as this child of the East. But she did not seem to notice him at all—only in a motherly way. He was certain that he found no favour in Rahlo's eyes.

But there he was wrong. Although Rahlo looked at him with no sign of interest in her expression and often seemed as if she had forgotten his presence, her thoughts were full of him. She admired his broad shoulders, his grave grey eyes, his clean-cut features.

She pictured herself going back to England with him. She determined to ask the chemist to make her a love-philtre to put in his food. From time to time she looked up shyly from under her long black lashes, and Hardacre could not understand what was running in her mind.

But one evening he was passing under her bedroom window when something struck him softly on the cheek and stooping, he picked up a small square of silk on which Arabic words had been worked in coloured beads. It gave out a faint odour of oil of jasmine. Then came a low, amorous ripple of laughter, and the window was softly closed again.

As soon as Hardacre looked at the token he realised that it was a love message from Rahlo, delivered in the native fashion. He was not prepared for this kind of thing. He had no intention of beginning a love affair with a native girl, which could only end disastrously.

That night Hardacre could not sleep much. He lay awake, thinking of Rahlo, with her rounded cheek, her inviting eyes, and her hair, which glinted like the blue steel of a gun-barrel. When he did sleep, he had dreams in which she held the high place.

He rose early and wondered as he bathed and shaved, what the day would bring forth. Catching sight of his own reflection in the looking-glass, he could not help but notice the look of healthiness which had returned to his cheeks during the last few weeks of calm peace with Sayyid and Rahlo. His enforced lapse from the opium habit had worked wonders on him, and some of his old vigour and interest in mundane things of life had returned.

"By the way, Sayyid," said Hardacre that morning, "I don't think Rahlo has enough change for a girl of her age and vivaciousness. Perhaps she would like to come and dine with me at the Hotel d'Orient to-night."

"Splendid!" cried Rahlo.

"Her wish is sufficient for my agreement in the matter," said Sayyid.

"The Hotel d'Orient," the girl echoed. "Isn't that the new hotel which the big French firm built when I was away at Cairo—the place with the delightful café built out into the harbour, lit up with thousands of little fairy lamps at night?"

"It's on the old harbour," he replied,

"but I don't know how long it has been built. The question is, would you like to come?"

Rahlo nodded and squeezed his arm.

AT THE HOTEL D'ORIENT

At length, when the hour of seven arrived—the hour fixed for the appointment with Rahlo drew near—Hardacre came into the main living-room resplendent in a new suit of white ducks, a good-looking well-set up man. His heart thumped as he heard Rahlo coming down the wide stairs which led directly into the room. She appeared with her hat off, and her dark hair done in a new and wonderful way that made her look like some mysterious Egyptian princess, and a girl at the same time.

Hardacre led Rahlo into the "Way of Pearls," where they obtained the hire of a swift carriage with two ponies to drive them to the Hotel d'Orient.

"How nice of you to bring me," said Rahlo softly, as he led her into the small but picturesque hotel on the harbour. A polite waiter came forward, bowing the bow only accorded to the man who exhales a strong aura of prosperity and profusion of tips.

"This way, sir," he said, "the first floor if you wish to dine in the open-air restaurant over the harbour."

Hardacre nodded.

"Come along, child," he said, "I'm frightfully hungry."

"Are you? I'm not."

He was rather pleased with Rahlo for saying this. He thought that things would lose much charm if the girl had been foolishly hungry—too intent upon the excellence of the foodstuffs to realise that a dinner in a restaurant over a dreamy coloured, luke-warm sea was not so much a meal as a romance.

But in spite of that, Hardacre told himself that he must not allow the friendship to develop into anything more intimate, indeed, his purpose in taking Rahlo out to dinner was to show an adamant front to her allurements.

"Perhaps," said Hardacre, as they sat down on the divan whilst the waiter put the finishing touches to the table. "Perhaps you would like an absinthe before dinner."

Rahlo hesitated, but eventually thought she would try it.

When the drinks were served, she swallowed the absinthe with a little crinkling of her white forehead.

The surrounding hush seemed to have cast a spell over all. When the dusk falls over the Mediterranean the whole world seems to fall into silence—a silence so subtle, so gleaming, so alluring—so wonderful with its pure blending of shadows and colour—that it soothes the brain with almost the same effect as the power of some insidious drug.

The dinner was rather a silent affair. Rahlo's love token—the native avowal of attachment—had invested the night with unforeseen possibilities, nay probabilities. Hardacre had said that he was hungry, but his heart was beating like a steam-hammer, and such energy is fatal to appetite. He ate mechanically, his eyes rarely leaving the shadowy blue-black hair, and faun-like eyes that smiled at him across the table.

Rahlo had determined to win the Englishman by hook or by crook, and with him sitting there so close to her, she wished desperately as she had often wished before, that either Hardacre hadn't seemed quite so desirable in her eyes, or else that she herself hadn't been separated from him by the racial line,

which irrevocably divides the East and West.

She had lied with the perfect spontaneity of the East when she had told him that this was her first *tête-à-tête* dinner with a man. She had taken many such dinners at Cairo—at the Italian Club, on the terraces of Kasr-El-Nil Skating Rink, or the Café Reiche, looking upon them as a mere commonplace of the irresponsible Cairo life, where the tyranny and cruelty of the East for ever drones out its undertones and men take their opportunities with happy-go-lucky gusto.

But of such men as Hardacre she knew little. Experience only touched the various groupings of Egyptian society, which did not include the English population. She had moved much among the Italian-French-Arabic-Greek inhabitants, where society is collectively merged under the one heading of "Cairenes."

But here, to-night, things seemed different. The men she had met in Cairo were lower voiced, softer-footed and keener eyed, all of which betokens the amber-coloured complexion and Oriental blood, and their womenfolk were of the type one sees at the pigeon-shoot on Sunday afternoons—gambling on the wholesale slaughter of the birds, with hard, bold eyes.

"How nice it is of you to bring me here," said Rahlo in a languid, luscious voice, which is one of the triumphs of the merging of East and West. "Why are you doing all this for me?"

Hardacre looked into the dark tranquillity of her eyes and became confused.

"Because—because I like you," he stammered. "You see I feel that I owe you a great deal for the way you looked after me on the steamer. It was good of you to put yourself out for a poor derelict like me."

Rahlo shrugged her shoulders and took his answer without an outward tremor, and her eyes were still calm and undisturbed—but within she had lost herself in a whirl of strange, throbbing emotions.

BLACK BUTTERFLY AND MAUVE

The waiter brought coffee, tall, fluted glasses of iced-water and Grand Marnier, and left them with a studied gesture, which seemed to imply that he would not return until he was called.

Rahlo drank the iced-water gratefully, and pushed back the coffee and liqueur.

"What other reason could there be, child?"

Rahlo hesitated.

"I have heard girls in Cairo, in Alexandria, talk a lot," she replied. "I dare say a good deal of it is nonsense. But—but they always say that no Englishman ever shows ordinary friendship to a girl of the East. . . ."

"Well?"

Rahlo dropped her eyes.

"Well, you know. . . . Does the black butterfly mate with the mauve?"

"Look here," said Hardacre. "You don't understand these things, Rahlo. We are just friends and we must keep so. If I made love to you I should be simply deceiving you, for I shall return to my own people in the end. It would not be right to love and leave you. Life is a thing that hurts enough in the ordinary way, my dear! It hurts without logic or reason. Anyhow—there is no need to go hurting you, is there?"

Rahlo looked up without a word, with her face flushed and rebellion in her fine eyes, and Hardacre bent down and kissed her cheek. She leant back to put her arm about him, drew his

face down and burst into a storm of tears.

Hardacre lifted her and held her in his arms and kissed her again—incredibly—without a spark of emotion. They were not lovers, but two human souls fighting their way out of a spasm of pain. At last Hardacre tore himself away from Rahlo.

"If you leave me I shall die," she cried. "Darling, don't leave me. Let us go on just being friends; but don't leave me. . . .

During the next few weeks Hardacre struggled with all kinds of obstinate interrogations. He wondered if all the world was even as he, urged to this by one motive and to that by another, creatures of chance and impulse, swayed by a kiss or a pipe of opium or a mosquito bite. Had he indeed to abide by what he had said and done and chosen?

After all, why shouldn't he reject the conventions of the West and marry Rahlo? She was loyal and generous, and would make a good wife. Why not marry her and settle down in Jaffa, and there work out the residue of his days?

Day after day he contemplated life and Rahlo and his future. It was a crowded and muddled contemplation. It invaded his dreams and even made him forget opium for a while. But the drug habit was too strong in him to remain dormant for long.

One evening, just as Rahlo was thinking of going up to her bed, Rosetta, the maid, came to her with a scared face.

"The old chemist spoke truly to me this morn when he said the English effendi was an evil man and a wizard," she whined. "Come quickly! He is making magic in the garden . . . he will put us all under an evil spell."

Rahlo came upon Hardacre in the garden, and she had an idea that another figure glided into the shadows just as she arrived. Hardacre lay flat on his face, his hands clasped and his chin resting on them. Before him was a small Egyptian chafing-dish, and something was burning on a little pile of red-hot charcoal with a vicious green flame, and on this Hardacre's eyes were fixed; a new opium pipe was clenched in his hands.

He made no sign that he saw or heard. He raised his head sharply and frowned, taking from his pocket a glass plate, which he held above the flame for a moment. Then he turned it over and inspected it. Dark characters—they looked like Persian characters—had appeared on the plate. He grunted and muttered:

"Forty guardians and a tall, tall tower . . ."

Rosette gazed at him aghast.

"He is making charms against us, mistress. What a horrid sight!"

"H'sh!" said Rahlo guardedly from her side, as though in the presence of spirits. "He is receiving a message from somewhere; the words are not from him."

THE TREASURE OF RAM-ALLAH

Something seemed to crack in Rahlo's brain; or it might have been the hair on her head. She watched and waited. From his blue lips—the lips of a man in a hypnotic trance—came clear, without a tremor:

"The forty companions and a tall, tall tower."

"The tall, tall tower," he muttered, under wrinkled brows. "That's what I wanted. Good! Now for it! Now then! Good! Oh, by Allah, that's good!" He grunted again and bit his

under-lip. "Now for the second line—the key line," he said softly. "I cannot get it yet. It is all in the twilight."

Rahlo noticed how his face grew agitated and anxious, for fear the power to find the next line should be snatched from him. The anguish of mind was now tenfold sharper.

"Not quite yet—not quite," he whispered. "Give me time. Do wait a moment. I shall get that line:

" 'The forty companions and a tall, tall tower
Guard the treasure at Ramallah.'

"Ouh, soul of a dog!"

Hardacre raised himself on his elbows, shivered from head to heel, then rolled over on his back.

Together they carried him back to the house, and Rahlo, as before, watched over him. As she sat there, the lines he had muttered kept recurring in her mind, and suddenly she realised that they referred to the Mosque Djamia el Abiad, with its tower of the Forty Companions of the Prophet, which was only a few miles outside the town of Yafo. So that might be the hiding-place of the treasures of the Western Crusaders!

A sudden fear that Hardacre had at last hit upon the treasure rushed upon her. In that case his journey was at an end, and he would return to his own country. That is, if he remembered anything about it when he recovered. . . . She could not bear to think of him going out of her life. . . .

Hardacre awoke two hours later to find Rahlo standing at the door watching him. He sat up.

"Well," said Rahlo, "you've been at the opium again! You won't take long to drive yourself mad the way you're going on, if that's your wish. I suppose that man I saw lurking at the back of the banana-tree gave you the stuff?"

"Which man?" asked Hardacre with a bewildered look. "Oh, yes—yes, a native fellow, of course. He gave me the opium. I told you it was the vital spark of life to me. I couldn't do without it. Have I been talking? I've had a bit of a doze. Did I talk a lot of nonsense? You look rather——"

"You startled me," she answered. "You looked so—so horrible. Were you dreaming?"

"I do not remember anything. It is all a blank—everything spins before me in a rainbow-tinted whirl at such times."

Rahlo took a damascene-workbox filled with opium away from him, and he whined like a child. She then turned away, thinking it best to say nothing about the "Forty Companions," to him, so she merely remarked:

"You'd better have a cold bath. I'll tell Rosetta to bring you the towels."

Early next morning Rahlo, looking down from her window, saw Hardacre pacing up and down the garden. She dressed and went down to him.

"Do you feel better?" she asked him in a soft voice. "Oh, why do you smoke that terrible drug? I thought you were going to give it up."

While she was speaking she was taking notes of Hardacre's state of mind and body. He stopped.

"You have not told me anything about your hunt for the hidden treasure lately. Have you given it up?" she asked, looking into his eyes.

Hardacre's eyes wandered restlessly over the rounded span of shimmering ocean before them, and he answered in a stupid, far-away voice:

"Oh, I don't worry—or care much about that—not now."

Rahlo now felt convinced that Hardacre knew nothing about the two lines concerning the "Forty Companions" and the treasure. She looked upon the delivery of the secret to her alone as pure magic.

THE CABLE FROM ENGLAND

Rahlo was sniffing a spray of orange-blossom and looking up at the moon; and Hardacre was sitting on a fountain on the Yafo road. All was very still — that passionate, tropical stillness with a pulse in it. Somewhere, close at hand, a native was playing a twittering tune on a reed-flute, and a girl's voice singing a plaintive chant joined with it.

The conscience of Hardacre all the day had played hot and cold with his nerves, for that morning he had received a cable from his brother in England that had somewhat flabbergasted him:

RETURN TO ENGLAND. FATHER DANGEROUSLY ILL. GREATLY DESIRES TO SEE YOU AGAIN. YOUR PRESENCE MAY SAVE HIS LIFE.

He felt that this summons was one that must be obeyed. Yes, he felt that he must pull himself together and go, even if he had to return again to his hiding-place in the East. But he had to break the news to Rahlo, and he did not care for this task. He felt very sorry for the girl too.

But even when he thought how beautiful she looked in the silvered moonlight he could not bring himself to ever think of marrying her. He had seen her strike a Mulatto slave-girl across the face with a hide-whip, and torture a scorpion with a red-hot skewer. He had been shocked by her calculating cruelty; and at times the shadow of deep passion in her eyes had frightened him. So, haltingly, he told her the truth—told her that he was leaving her.

Hardacre did not like to think of that scene for many weeks afterwards.

He saw her bosom rising and falling beneath her silk blouse as she struggled to hold herself from a burst of passion. She clutched at her neck; and as his voice failed him he heard the hiss of her breathing in the moments of silence that followed.

"I did not think I mattered at all to you, Rahlo," he said.

The girl made no answer; then she laughed. It was a reckless kind of laugh, and many men would have looked out for the trouble that was ahead. But Hardacre was thinking of other things, and he did not see the fury in those dark eyes.

No one will ever know what trouble of heart Rahlo must have undergone after Hardacre returned to England. A few weeks later she died. The doctor said it was pneumonia, but all the village knew that there was a crack in her heart and evil spirits entered and pressed her to death.

Her soul came back a little and her lips moved before she died. Sayyid Musjid bent down to listen.

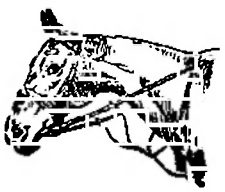
"Bury with my body the silver cigarette-case which the English effendi gave me. Burn all other things belonging to me."

Hardacre did not reach England in time to see his father alive, and after a few days in London he yearned for the sea-coast, with its glowing light and clean air. One evening, while walking on Brighton's long glittering parade—while all Brighton, that is to say as much of it as could crowd on the sea-front was out taking the air—Hardacre was aware that some woman, apparently at a vast distance, was calling him by his Christian name.

It struck him that he had heard the voice before, but when and where he could not at once remember. In the short space it took to cross the road to the Grand Hotel he had thought over a dozen women who might have played

a trick on him, and had eventually decided that it must have been a passer-by speaking to some other Ralph.

THE ARAB'S PONY



In the drive of the Grand Hotel his eye was arrested by the sight of a black Arab pony, with native saddle, decorated with beads and shells. It looked very much out of place, standing beside several luxurious motor-cars.

In a moment his mind flew back to Jaffa and Rahlo's Arab pony with a sense of irritation and dread. Poor Rahlo was dead and buried . . . and yet . . . and yet he could swear that the pony was the one which he had often seen her riding in Jaffa. It is impossible to say what a strange sense of apprehension the sight of that harmless pony evoked in him.

Hardacre went up to the hall-porter and said:

"That Arab pony will get hurt by one of the cars soon. I wonder who was careless enough to leave it unattended like that?"

"What? Where?" the hall-porter asked. "I can't see any Arab pony, sir."

Hardacre looked round again. The pony was no longer there. How long he stood motionless he did not know. Everything around him seemed to gyrate in glittering circles. Finally, he was aroused by the porter picking up the walking-stick which he had dropped, and asking whether he was feeling faint.

From the fantastic to the familiar is but a step. He took the stick with a mumbled thanks and dashed half-fainting into the bar for a large brandy and soda.

Lord Combermere, the aeronaut who had just returned from rising higher in the Stratosphere than any other man had done, was sitting with a friend at one of the coffee-tables. Hardacre had been at school with Combermere, and the sight of the famous aeronaut was somehow very comforting.

He plunged into the midst of a conversation at once, and the fact that he was seeing and talking to people who would not vanish in smoke was more comforting to him at that moment than the consolations of religion. Hardacre wanted lights and company—just as a child who has had some dreadful dream leaps out of bed and rushes downstairs to find light and companionship.

Only when the last guest had departed from the bar did Hardacre go up to his bedroom. A few minutes after he had tumbled into bed the voice called a second time:

"Ralph! Ralph, darling!"

There was no mistake about the words or the voice this time. It was Rahlo calling, and her voice rang through his brain.

"Oh, do forgive me. I should have told you that I knew the secret of the treasure of Ram-allah. But you ran away from me—oh, cruel, cruel man. But I loved you—always shall love you. Listen . . . It becomes difficult to make my voice reach you. You will find the treasure somewhere in the Tower of the Forty Companions at Karamouk. One mile north of the Well of Rishtan."

The voice dwindled until there was only a singing sound in his ears. Before he dropped off to sleep, Hardacre's brain went round and round the trend of thought; and again and again he gave up, baffled and in despair.

The location of the treasure of Ram-allah seemed likely to be correct. The voice was as inexplicable as the source of information regarding the treasure. And yet the whole thing was so absurd.

Next morning Hardacre explained to himself, with optimism which morning sunlight brings to night-long wrestling

with a problem, that his brain, digestion and eyesight had all three started to jib at the same moment.

"After all," he argued, "the presence of Rahlo's Arab pony was in itself enough to prove the existence of a spectral illusion. One may hear phantom voices and see the ghost of a dead woman, but surely never the ghost of a pony. The whole thing seems too absurd to be considered seriously."

On the following morning Hardacre decided to put a hundred miles between himself and the pursuing voice. He caught a coach which landed him at an inn in a remote village in Cornwall.

For bleak, unadulterated dolefulness that inn was the worst of many that he had passed a night in. The coffee-room, a grizzly museum of stuffed birds, foxes, dogs and fish, whispered of stale beer, tobacco and the dust of all the centuries. His bedroom windows would not open, and the bed exhaled a faint aroma of mildew and rats.

Then came supper with pickled onions, ancient cold mutton, and an apple-pie with leathery crust. It was just the sort of meal and evening to make a man remember his past sins, and think about any others he intended to commit if he ever survived the damp bed which awaited him.

Hardacre took a stiff peg of brandy to dilute his misery, and just as his mind was growing drowsy he heard the clop-clop-clop of a horse in the court-yard below him and the sound of someone dismounting on the cobbles. Then he heard the rider rapping on the door with the handle of her whip. Of course, it was a "her"—he was certain of that.

By this time Hardacre was beginning to realise that he was bound to the side of Rahlo's ghost till the end of Time. Very much against his will he jumped out of bed and peered through the window—which had been sealed in its frame by countless coats of paint. He picked up a small poker, and after a struggle, forced the window open a little way.

Peering down into the court-yard he could just discern the shadowy face of his dead and buried friend Rahlo. The face was white and cold and there was a horrid sort of soullessness about her eyes. She didn't look dead, and she didn't look quite alive. She spoke to Hardacre then—or did she send a message to his brain? Anyway, her lips did not move, but he heard her just as clearly as if she had spoken the words.

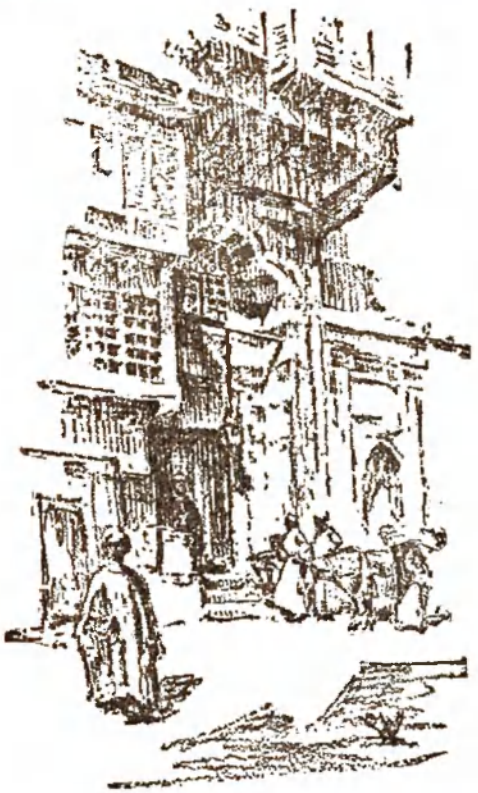
"Ralph, you must help me to come back to you. I am very weak at present, but every day I shall get stronger. Soon we will return to Jaffa and hunt for the treasure of Ram-allah. You will help me, Ralph, won't you?"

Hardacre watched her in horrid perplexity. Somehow, the idea of this dead thing getting stronger and stronger filled him with bewilderment and terror. Then the dead girl began to move, and all at once he realised, with horror, that she was so weak that she staggered about in a groping and random fashion. With a cry of disgust Hardacre slammed the window down, and going over to the bed he sank down in a parozysm of terror.

Hardacre no longer wished to seek the treasure of Ram-allah, but he desired peace and repose more than anything else in the world. The presence of Rahlo filled him by turns with horror, blind fear, a dim sort of remorse and utter despair. He felt that her shadow would not rest until he had returned to Jaffa and found the treasure. His own anxiety was to satisfy Rahlo's demands as quickly as possible, and so rid himself of her ghostly company.

BACK IN JAFFA

Of course, Rahlo was waiting for Hardacre when he landed at Jaffa a few weeks later, and she seemed to gain strength, just as surely as Hardacre's vital force was ebbing away from him. Once she clutched his wrist and her



nails seemed to bite into his flesh and he felt his strength flowing from his body into hers. Then he suddenly knew with an awful certainty that if he did not soon free himself from her he would be dead within a few weeks.

Hardacre had been welcomed at the Trianon Hotel and safely installed in a large room looking towards the orange-groves of Sarona. A few days later he went down with a slight attack of fever. He dosed himself with gin, Worcester sauce and cayenne—rather an empiric treatment, and it cannot be claimed that it had any tranquillising effect on him.

In the end he phoned for a doctor, and a young Syrian physician came to see him. He soon diagnosed the case of Ralph Hardacre. A man who through secret troubles had taken drugs until eyes, brain and stomach had all become thoroughly unhealthy.

"First of all," he said in a coaxing tone, "I'll give you some stuff which will make you jolly well sleep like a log. No bad dreams; nothing but—how do you say it?—just forgetting."

The young doctor soothed the haggard man on the bed.

"To-morrow I'll be round to take you in hand seriously. I'll have you well in a few days. You've nothing to worry about at all. Hold out your arm. That's right—now . . ."

The doctor bent over the expectant Hardacre with a dainty hypodermic syringe and pumped enough morphia into him to rest him for six hours.

A smile of relief and repose began to creep over Hardacre's face.

"I hope Rahlo won't get past this," he whispered. "God! All my . . . troubles vanishing in mist . . . this is supreme happiness! Doctor . . . you must lend me that sy..nge. I lost mine in Cairo . . . lost . . . lost . . ."

The voice ceased and Hardacre slipped back on the pillow.

The light-headedness which accompanies fever acts differently on different men. Hardacre's delirium gave way to a fierce determination to wipe out Rahlo's ghost once and for all. It struck him that his best plan would be to have a saddled horse ready and then when Rahlo rode up on her pony he would mount and ride her down—and if necessary flay girl and horse with a riding-whip.

This, of course, was merely the semi-delirious notions of a man devil ridden by fever and nerves; but it struck Hardacre as being eminently practical. It must be remembered that the Unseen had now become more dominant in Hardacre's life than the Seen. If ever a man was being hounded to his death by the Powers of Darkness, he was that man. He therefore ordered a native boy to saddle a horse and await with it at the rear of the house.

That evening as Hardacre was walking in the orange-grove which adjoined the garden of the hotel, he saw Rahlo mounted on her pony blocking his path

in the twilight. He doubled back, mounted his horse, giving it a vicious cut with the whip. The horse had not been out of the stable for a couple of days, and he was off like a flash of a pistol. The brute bolted straight up the Jaffa road, leaving the town far behind and flying over the open desert at racing speed.

As he sped along the phantom of Rahlo dissolved into swimmy specks within his eyes, and in a few moments he had almost forgotten why it was that he was astride a horse and why he carried a clumsy hide whip. But he was not a bit surprised to find that his feet were bare and that he was wearing only a suit of silk pyjamas.

Hardacre must have lost consciousness, for when he recovered he was kneeling on the soft white sand, and looking up at a tall square tower which gleamed whitely in the moonlight. It seemed someone wanted to speak to him badly; trying to call him by name, but the voice was no more than a husky whisper. . . .

CURSES

Suddenly there was a sound behind him of a horse at the gallop. His head flew round in the ready apprehension of his pursuer. The hoofs drew nearer in the twilight, for the unknown rode with reckless haste. A second more and Rahlo reigned up her pony beside him, hair flying, half clothed. Hardacre met her eyes with a look of such hate and disgust that she cowered before it.

"Rahlo," said Hardacre, speaking slowly, as if weighing every word he uttered. "As a friend whom you have haunted day after day and month after month, I curse you! As a man who hates the sight of you, I curse you! As a man who is about to die, I curse you! And as one who, in this awful moment, calls Heaven to aid him, I curse you!"

"What! You curse me?" Hardacre felt her screaming from between her white, clenched teeth. "You would try to drive me away? No, no, Ralph. Our souls are united. You can never run away from me again." She clung to him as if her slender arms were made of steel. "I am stronger than you are now, Ralph. You must come with me."

Hardacre cursed and raised his whip to cut down the phantom, but checked himself suddenly, for he was afraid he was going mad. He must not let himself go. Was it pure hallucination? He felt that all the world round him was unreal and fantastic. He felt he was slipping, and stood for a moment battling for his sanity.

He looked down at his bare feet. . . . It was strange that he should be standing on the open desert dressed in pyjamas. He reasoned with himself. Was this all some ghastly dream? Perhaps he would wake up soon and find himself in bed at the Trianon Hotel.

"Remember how you chased up and down Syria and Palestine searching for the treasure of Ram-allah?" asked Rahlo. "Well, it was only a few miles from Jaffa all the time. This is the Tower of the Forty Companions, and the treasure must be hidden somewhere in its stone-work. But I suppose you are no longer interested in such things. You're such a changeable man, Ralph —and, I fear, rather ungrateful. Instead of thanking me for guiding you to the treasure tower you curse me."

Rahlo laughed, and Hardacre thought that he had never heard anything so horrible in his life. Then she gripped his arm and her face came within an inch of his. It was human and yet somehow not human, and he noticed that the flesh had now grown firmer and warmer looking.

It became evident to Hardacre that the dead Rahlo was now filled with a

malign energy; her face was set with a positively devilish determination. She turned and urged Hardacre towards the door in the base of the tower. Fighting like mad all the time to get away from her he stumbled along until they reached the door.

"Up the steps—up the steps," she was panting, and her dark eyes were set like flaming things on the dark spiral stairway which led up the well-dark interior of the tower.

Up and up the steps they stumbled. Hardacre no longer had the will of strength to oppose Rahlo's wishes. He moved upward, urged forward by a monstrous compulsion.

Round and round, and up and up that horrible winding stairway he went with Rahlo following him. Her grip in him was so strong that her nails seemed to burn into his flesh. At last they reached the top and came out on a flat stone roof.

Three hundred feet below them the country was a neat pattern of toy palm-trees and groups of mud huts. Hardacre drew back from this low parapet, but Rahlo was behind him.

"If you pushed me over the side I should fall down, and down, and down," she murmured.

"Don't talk so wildly, Rahlo."

She leant against him, and he felt the beat of her heart. Then she laughed. A sudden panic seized Hardacre. Was Rahlo pressing against him with the intention of edging him towards the side of the platform?

He felt a sick fear creep over him. Perhaps he was going to faint. He stood there swaying like a flame of a candle in the draught.

"Rahlo, save me, I can't keep away from the brink of the cursed place. . . . For heaven's sake, help me!"

But Rahlo's body was slowly but surely pressing him towards the edge. He had no power to resist the gentle pressure, no will to fight with an overmastering fear.

He toppled and fell. Then everything spun before him in a golden-tinted whirligig. He heard Rahlo laugh. . . .

* * * * *

The next morning the doctor called at the Trianon Hotel as he had arranged.

"Is Mr. Hardacre awake yet?" he asked the hall-porter, swinging himself off his horse at the door.

The porter shook his head. "No," he said. "He has not buzzed down for his tea or hot water yet."

"I'll just have a look at him," said the doctor. "If he's in a nice peaceful sleep I will not disturb him."

When the doctor entered the bedroom, Hardacre had departed this life eight hours before. He had rolled out of bed and the body lay on its back, hands clenched by its side, and *the neck was broken*. In the staring eyes was written terror that cannot be expressed by the printed word.

"Must have been scared to death about something," said the doctor, to the manager of the hotel, who had entered behind him.

The manager walked over and knelt by the doctor's side.

"As far as I can make out," said the doctor at length, rising, "he died from a broken neck, but it's all against medical science."

"What's against medical science?" the manager asked.

"Why, a broken neck from a fall of three feet," answered the doctor. "The fall seems to have jolted his whole system to pieces and dislocated several joints. A most inexplicable case . . ."

The doctor nodded and muttered some very mysterious and technical phrases which died away as he pulled the counterpane from the bed and covered Hardacre's staring eyes.

The Suicide God

Oriental Vengeance in London

by ROLAND WILD

NOT even the chief of the Kannu Clan, who must have been chiefly responsible, could have said how it happened. He was called "Elder," and was reputed to know everything. But probably he would have bowed and hissed at you in the manner of his race, and expressed complete ignorance, save perhaps for a polite whisper that perhaps it was because there was a big fire in the rich quarter of San Francisco that night. But suddenly, two minutes after the fire-engines went roaring through the streets with the bell ringing and the horses' hoofs making a grand tattoo on the rough streets, the clan war was on.

There was not a man or woman of the Clans Kannu and Miko who did not know all about it inside four minutes. At one moment they were drinking green tea in the crazy roof gardens of the Chinese quarter, and the next moment they seemed all to be armed with knives and in the streets, swarming down the twisted staircases like sailors down the rigging. "Wai Hei!" they yelled, and were in the streets looking for trouble. They found it.

It was probably because the police were busy at the fire that the war grew to the proportions of a historic event. But the fire was an event, anyway. The great fire of San Francisco remains longer in the public memory, and for good reason, than the Clan war between

the Kannus and the Mikos. That is, among people who know little of Chinese honour. Among the Chinese, of course, the fire rightly took secondary place.

The Street of the Thousand Pleasures runs right up towards heaven, and even to-day you can get an idea of the turmoil there must have been on its slopes when knives were out and police were busy elsewhere. The history-books say little about it, for in those days it was expected that there should be fights in San Francisco.

But according to the few garbled accounts that have survived, the victory for the Clan Kannu was a decisive one. They had certainly brought their customs with them when they came over the Pacific to make a Chinese colony here on the hills of the great pioneer city of America.

It was a silent battle, save for the groans of the injured and the dying. There were no guns in the quarter. They fought and won with the strength of their wrists and the agility of their legs.

You could see, up and down the street, a thousand little battles, man against man, twisting and straining and groaning. Most of the time you would have said that this was a series of polite wrestling matches.

But then, if you watched carefully, you would see the glint of a knife, and you would know that this was business, religious business, at that. For the Kannus were intent on obtaining their idol, the idol of the Yellow Ears.

Ten minutes after the fire-bells had sounded, there was not a Chinese on the street who did not belong to the Clans of Kannu or Miko. From the paper windows of innumerable crowded rooms the other inhabitants of the Chinese quarter watched the struggle, but they knew better, and were too honourable to favour one side or the other.

Women were down there, too, twisting and turning, battling between the tall houses that formed the Street of the Thousand Pleasures. There were gallant forays on one house after another, and the fights continued up the crazy stairways and even on to the balconies that clung so precariously to the leaning houses.

More than once a balcony gave way, and on to the milling crowd below there fell two brocade-clad figures, still clawing at each other as they fell, the knives flickering in the pale glow of lanterns as they passed the various floors and crashed sickeningly on the ground.

But after a time, according to the accounts, it was obvious that the spontaneous battle was going all one way. For the first time for a century, the Kannus were in the ascendancy, and more and more you heard the rallying cry of their clan as one after the other, the Mikos were vanquished and slain or chased into ignominious defeat.

A dozen small fires had been started in the apartment-houses in the street, but these were quickly extinguished by agile men accustomed to the hazard of fire. The shouts, the screams, the crash of bodies and the crackle of flames made this a nightmare scene, fitting for the making of Clan history. Lucky it is, said the old men of the street, that the police are busy elsewhere.

But eventually it was obvious that victory had been won. The turmoil below resolved into a steady progress in one direction. The Kannus had won, and were going for the idol. Perhaps, said the old men, it would be the end of Clan warfare for many years to come.

When the dawn came out of the Pacific, and the morning fog rolled over the city of hills, there was little to be seen in the Chinese quarter that gave evidence of the grim battle of the night. The clans had taken away their dead and dying. And men in those days asked no questions. The Kannus had the idol of the Yellow Ears, but the gold-scrabbling white men of the coast could not be expected to take interest in such a domestic quarrel.

THE NEXT BATTLE

The old men who predicted peace for a number of years were right, though even they, wise as they were, could not have foreseen the circumstances of the next clan battle. Fifty years had gone by before the last of the Kannus battled again for the idol. And the scene was no lantern-lit, paper-gay street on a hill. The scene was off the Strand in London.

Nor was the last of the Kannu Clan a man who would have received the approval of the elders of the Street of a Thousand Pleasures. The clan had brought its customs across the Pacific, but the customs had not survived the years of modernity and hustle. Almost the only relics of the clan left were the name and the possession of the idol. Kannu, he called himself. Mister Kannu, American citizen, by profession a juggler, terms by arrangement with agent.

Now, as he walked along the Strand to the Alba Hotel, the exclusive supper resort where he was performing in the cabaret, he fitted into the cosmopolitan background perfectly. There was no trace of the East left, you would say. Mr. Kannu's smart tweeds, pinched Homburg hat and brown shoes made him a typical citizen of every capital in the world.

"Hello there, Kannu!"

He stopped in his tracks, turned, and greeted his acquaintance with a wide sweep of the arm that was typically American.

"Miko!" he said. "Where have you dropped in from?"

The two Chinese shook hands, slapped each other on the back, grinned with genuine pleasure at the meeting. Professional rivals with the tinsel and the multi-coloured balls, smiling stars of the cabaret floors all over the world.

"How are things?" said Miko. "I'm in from Stockholm, start to-morrow at the Paramount for a week, then maybe the big bottle-parties for a month. Business good here, they tell me. How's the act, Kannu? Still pulling them in?"

"Good enough," said Kannu. "I've got a new variation I'll show you."

"We're quits, then," said Miko. "I've got something that rolls 'em in the aisles. My agent suggested it. Bit of history, kind of. I wouldn't know much about it, but the agent said it was the genuine stuff. Ever hear of the Suicide God? Little fellow with yellow ears. Gets a laugh, I can tell you . . ."

Kannu stopped smiling. The light went out of his eyes and he stared intently at his friend.

"Yellow Ears?" he said. "You use the idol in the act? The Suicide God, Miko? But—but you shouldn't do that. I have it with me here. It's always been with me. Miko—you shouldn't do that!"

"Boloney," said Miko. "I'm using it—see? I don't know nothing about it. My agent says it's a good angle, and I'll say he's right. Puts glamour into the show. Authentic, and all that. Come along and see the rehearsal at six to-night at the Paramount. You'll like it. O.K.? See you there, then."

Mr. Kannu walked along the Strand without seeing the busy life around him. When, rarely, he indulged in any kind of self-examination, he saw himself as an American gentleman who had inherited, together with his Chinese descent, a wonderful and profitable dexterity with batons, rubber balls, oranges, chromium wands, tables, fans and coloured paper. This dexterity was his living, and a very good living too.

If anyone had reminded him that he was a Chinese, he would have smiled, looked slightly puzzled, and shown his

passport. He considered himself to be Chinese in the same way that other Americans admitted they were left-handed. But sometimes, if he ever betrayed himself in some act that was "oriental," he took himself severely to task.

He was an American citizen, he told himself. He had never seen the Far East, and he probably never would go. It made him all the more angry, therefore, that his instinct still reverenced the Kannu idol.

More than once Mr. Kannu had looked doubtfully at the small polished teak box in which there resided, in a lining of green silk, the idol of the Yellow Ears. True, it took up only a small corner of his personal suitcase, but there were awkward moments when he had been asked to explain its presence to customs men, and often enough he had considered putting it in his professional luggage, where it could easily pass as a stage prop essential for his act.

But something stopped him from doing that. Angrily, he denied to himself that he was afraid of insulting Yellow Ears. But he knew it was true.

Then there was another matter that worried him greatly. From the time when he learnt pidgin English at his father's knee, almost, he had worn a knife. It wasn't carried, it was worn. Throughout his life it had lain flat against his forearm, attached by two thin bands that could be slipped with a deft movement of the wrist.

When he was a youth, he had gained renown for the skill and speed with which the knife had come sliding into his hand, ready for use. For years now he had never tried the trick. He did not even know if his fingers were slim enough, deft enough any more. In truth, he did not like the knife being there at all. He had tried to rid himself of the habit of wearing it.

One night, he had left it off when he dressed for a show. He never left it off again, for it was one of the most disastrous nights of his career. He had never been so clumsy, and afterwards decided that there was more than mere habit in the wearing of the knife; it was a symbol. Then, catching himself out as he thought that, he called himself several kinds of a fool.

LOUSY BOLONEY

Kannu's agent was waiting for him behind the cabaret stage of the Alba.

"Listen, Kannu," he said, "I've got news for you. You know Miko? He's a rotten conjuror, but he's got brains. I've just heard about his new show. They're all talking about it. He's got a fake idol that he calls Yellow Ears the Suicide God, and he's rigged it up so the ears move. Sounds pretty lousy, but I tell you it's the goods. Mystic, see?

"He uses a lot of build-up, saying it's the genuine Miko idol, kind of family crest, see? Says his family brought it across from China to Frisco, and his grandfather was the big chief of the clan. Get it? It's the goods, all right, and we've got to think up something to beat it. Can't have people even making comparisons between you and another Chinese juggler, you know. What about it?"

"No," said Kannu.

"What d'you mean, no?" said the agent. "You've got the best show in town, or any other town, and I want it kept the best. The Suicide God, that's what he calls it. Claims it makes its owner do himself in if it's abused. Boloney, but the customers like it. And it's a good idea. Wish I'd thought of it myself.

"We got to keep thinking in this business, Kannu. Efficiency is not enough, as Napoleon or somebody said. What about you and me getting together and thinking up something that'll knock Miko for a row of ocean liners?"

"No," said Kannu.

The agent left stormily, and Kannu mechanically went through his morning rehearsal. As he tossed the balls and balanced the shining poles, the smile came back to his face, for that was part of the act. But his mind was working independently of his familiar routine.

Into his heart there came something of the same ferocity and fanaticism that had inspired his ancestors who had fought on the Hill of the Thousand Pleasures for the honour of the idol. Kannu knew nothing of the history of his clan, but he had been bred with that reverence as he had been bred with the gift of his profession and the black hair of his race. The idol of the Yellow Ears was being desecrated. Whatever the cost, he must defend it.

Six o'clock saw him at the Paramount Hotel, and the serious observer might have noticed that when he left the Alba, he looked at his watch, and timed his journey across the Strand very carefully. If you could have looked into that solemn mind, you could have seen that Kannu was even counting his footsteps, and that when he reached the staff entrance, where the artistes entered, he took mental note of the direction to the dressing-rooms. Under his arm, Kannu carried a brown paper parcel. In it was the precious teak idol that he had carried round Europe for so many years.

With a polite greeting for Miko, he took his place in the vast empty restaurant to watch the rehearsal. Certainly, he thought, Miko had improved. He was not so good as Kannu himself, but he was still good. Only the skilled eye of Kannu could see the slight strains that Miko put on himself, the clumsy gestures that an audience would not see.

"No," said Kannu to himself. "I have nothing to fear from Miko. He is good, but he is not so good as Kannu . . ."

The orchestra was approaching the crescendo, and Kannu knew that the desecration of Yellow Ears was to begin. It was an impressive build-up for the finale, and the agent had not lied when he said it was well presented. First, a manager came on the stage and told the story of "the ancestral god of the Clan Miko." Kannu gripped his seat, a small vein pulsing in his forehead.

"The name of the God," said the manager, "is, when translated, Yellow Ears, and, ladies and gentlemen, it has a sinister reputation. We are about to present the Suicide God! The God that demands the suicide of its subject! The God that has been worshipped by the ancient Clan of Miko for a thousand years, which has exacted its toll of Miko's ancestors since the dawn of time!

"Unique in the world, ladies and gentlemen, Miko dares to show you the idol to which he himself, at some time or another, will be victim! Ladies and gentlemen, we present Yellow Ears, the Suicide God!"

Even here, at a dress rehearsal, Kannu felt himself impressed. It was great showmanship. And when Miko came on the stage in yellow robes, bearing aloft the exact replica of Yellow Ears, Kannu felt queasy in the stomach. Miko's agent came over and crowed over him.

"What do you think of it, Kannu?" he said. "Good stuff, isn't it? You see that idol? Copied exact from an original drawing, the experts say. Cost me a packet, too. The story is O.K., too. Real bit of history. We take trouble over our acts, Kannu. Got a Chinese scholar to dig up the facts for us.

"You mean," said Kannu. "You mean that is true—that there was a Suicide God?"

"Copper-bottomed," said the agent. "Miko wanted the exact model, and we made it, from pictures in the British Museum. It's exact to measure, I believe. Not that the customers would mind if it wasn't. But I suppose you Eastern gents like to be exact, what?"

"Yes," said Kannu mechanically. "Yes, we like to be exact."

The show was a shock to him. Not only was the new act a novelty that was likely to draw, but he felt it gripping even himself, who saw through this tomfoolery as pure ballyhoo. But a more serious thought crowded his brain; the idol that he thought meant so little to him, was being desecrated.

Silently, under cover of his seat, he began uncovering the original Yellow Ears. When he came out of Miko's dressing-room, after congratulations and a genial "see you later!" he still had a brown paper parcel of the same size. But, home in his flat, he tossed it carelessly into his trunk, in a way that he had never treated the old bit of teak that he had carried round for so many years.

On the night of Miko's opening at the Paramount, Kannu slipped off the stage with the usual burst of applause ringing in his ears after the ten-thirty cabaret. The smile faded from his wide face as he padded silently to his dressing-room, through the ranks of chorus-girls waiting to go on for the finale. Kannu always rested between shows, pulling a dressing-gown round his thin-clad form, putting his sandalled feet on a chair and reading the evening paper, drinking lime-juice and soda.

But to-night was Miko's opening show with the novelty "Suicide God."

THE ALIBI

As he went past the stairway leading to the stage-door-man's cubby-hole, he called: "Joe, I've got a message for you. Come up and get it, will you?"

The old man liked to be sent messages at this time of the evening, and Kannu knew it. Round the corner from the Alba there was a private bar that seemed empty between ten-thirty and eleven unless the stage door-keeper dropped in on some pretext or another.

Kannu wrote a hurried message on the hotel notepaper.

"Dear Miko," he wrote, while the door-keeper watched him, tongue licking his lips in anticipation. "This is to wish you the best of luck with the new show. It ought to go big. Yours, Kannu."

"Take it over to Miko at the Paramount, Joe, and here's half a crown. He opened there to-night, and I forgot to send him a wire. O.K. Let me know when you get back . . ."

The doorman lumbered heavily down the stairs. Behind him there was a slim shadow, noiseless on thin sandals, indistinguishable in a long macintosh, hat pulled down over the eyes. Kannu watched the doorman make his way over the road and round the corner to the private bar of the inn. As the swing doors closed behind him, he stepped steadily and unhurriedly over the route that he had already timed so minutely.

He stopped at the Paramount stage-door to listen. He was a dark shadow merging with the walls, out of range of the pale entrance-light. Under the door there was no break in the stream of

light. He pressed gently on the door. Before him there stretched only the empty concrete corridor, an iron stairway. On noiseless soles he was across the corridor and up the stairs in a flash.

Miko's dressing-room was third on the left. The dark shadow fled across, and as it moved, the old trick came back to Kannu. A flick of the wrist and the knife was in his hand. The American citizen had not forgotten his skill. . . .

"Why, Kannu——" said Miko. "Glad to see you. Come to congratulate me? That's real nice of you, Kannu."

"Look!" said Kannu, and directed a long steady finger at the idol that faced him on the dressing-room table.

Miko turned. As he did so the knife flashed, flicked out and was buried in his heart.

There was no sound. Miko crumpled, sagged forward, the knife still quivering in the thin fabric of his juggler's tunic. A slim and silent figure flashed through the door, raced down the stairs, across the dark street with footsteps unhurried.

As Kannu crossed the Strand, he saw Joe, the doorkeeper, push out of the private bar, waving a "Good night, all!" to the assembled company. A minute later Kannu was in his dressing-room, a gaudy robe over his shoulders, the evening paper over his knees, lime-juice and soda at his side.

"The Suicide God?" he said. "I wonder if it is possible. Old Yellow Ears of the Clan Kannu! Well, I guess funny things have happened in history —certainly in our history! The Suicide God!"

Midnight at the "Alba." The big restaurant had filled up with the after-theatre crowd, and the chatter and hum of a vast crowd reached its height. Kannu was ready for his second show. Joe had come back, panting slightly from his exertion, but vastly pleased to report that he had duly delivered the message.

"Gave it to the doorkeeper with me own 'ands," said Joe. "Any little job you want, any time o' night, ask me again, sir. And thank you, sir."

"Thank you, Joe," said Kannu.

A round of applause from the other side of the curtain told Kannu that the dancers were off the floor. An encore? The ballroom was silent again as they returned for one minute and a half, and another outburst of applause followed them.

Kannu rose, looked at himself again in the mirror, brushed an infinitesimal speck from his smooth satin tunic, and walked down to the curtains as the music surged into the grand crescendo of "Oriental" music that announced him. As he reached the curtain, the smile grew and broadened on his face. And at the same time, with the old unconscious gesture, his fore-arm muscles surged to feel the knife ready in its bands. . . .

He faltered, and the smile died on his face. He had forgotten his helplessness without the knife.

"Kannu!" said the stage manager. "Hey, Kannu! You're on! They're vamping the entrance for you already! Kannu!"

He was on the little stage. The smile was back, and the crowd was clapping for the well-known, the inimitable, the adroit little Chinese with the wide grin and the perfect symmetry of motion. His mind was divided, half directed upon the routine that lay before him, half panicking because a cog in the machine was missing. It was absurd, he told himself. His perfectly trained body, his perfectly trained mind, could go through with the thing without fear. Everything was the same, he told himself. Everything but the feel of a blade of steel on his forearm.

Yes, he was perfect. His assistant gave him the central pole of shining aluminium, and it was up on his chin, and the two compensating weights were balanced on its cross-bar, in the twinking of an eye. He watched the centre

of the bar, but he knew he could shut his eyes and still hold the intricate balance. The tinsel and the twin pillars, each resting on a fraction of the cross-bar, were in place. His chin scarcely moved to adjust the delicacy of the feat, and his smile remained painted on his smooth brown face.

Such things were mechanical. But now, while he was doing mechanical things, his mind raced away, and he saw above, the bright pyramid of tinsel and coloured silk and shining metal, the face of Miko as he turned towards the wall, all smiles. He saw, too, the eyes of the idol as they gazed at murder. With one hand he felt his assistant give him the wand and the plates for his spinning act, and while he gazed still above the crazy superstructure balanced by a hair's breadth above him, he went into his plate-spinning act.

The music was reaching its crescendo again. The first part of the act was nearly over. As the high note was reached, he flicked his chin, and the pole tilted, the cross-bar was tossed aside, the twin pyramids fell sideways into his waiting, flickering hands.

Yes, Kannu was perfect. There was nothing, he thought, that could upset the scientific magic of his art. As he bowed, the wide smile growing wider as the crowd shouted his applause, he turned back to the curtains. Behind, looking through the side screens, were two stranger in blue serge suits.

POLICE

"They've found him, then," Kannu thought. "They know he's dead. They think maybe I killed him."

Then he turned again to his assistant. The man had his chair ready, his multi-coloured boxes and his mouthpiece ready. Kannu gripped the chair, lightly and gently, and a second later he was standing on his hands. He steadied himself a half-second, took one hand away. His lithe body remained stationary in the air, heels together, his back a perfect arc. The assistant gave him the mouthpiece, and he twisted his head round and the assistant fitted the shining pole into the socket. As the cross-bar went on swiftly, Kannu thought:

"Those are the police. They have found Miko and they have come to see if I can do my act. If I cannot do my act, they will think I killed him."

The music was playing softly now, and the audience, quelled into silence by the tense atmosphere, watched Kannu, the world's greatest conjuror. They loved the effortless ease of that trim body poised on so slim a wrist. They looked at the muscles of his neck as he strained round to face the ceiling. They saw the precision and confidence with which he tossed the shining cylinders aloft, wondered at the simplicity of the feat.

"I am Kannu, the perfect," he whispered. "This is my life, and I cannot fail. This is my life."

The assistant saw beads of sweat on his brow as he moved swiftly to hand him the bamboo rod and the spinning plate. Getting old, Kannu? Off training, Kannu? His hand, as he touched it, was cold and clammy. Can you make it, Kannu?"

"This is my life. I cannot fail. The Suicide God, he called it. Old Yellow Ears. And I am an American citizen, and I cannot fail."

There were two seconds of tension when Kannu had piled up the astonishing pyramid of flimsy trinkets above him, balanced in the mouthpiece, and while he twirled the spinning plate. The spinning plate was nothing—just a piece of showmanship. Nor was the balance of the cubes and the pillars a

difficult feat, but before the orchestra reached its peak, Kannu would swing out his legs, then lower them gently until his neck seemed twisted to breaking-point.

Two men watched, without emotion, from the wings.

"Great act," said one. "He's the boy, all right."

"It's easy," said the other. "Easy for Chinks."

"One second," Kannu thought. "I have won, without the knife. . . ."

The orchestra reached the climax, and the lithe body curved up and round and down to the floor while the superstructure jumped and fell in a dozen pieces into their hands. Kannu's smile was back as he bowed, ran back off the stage.

"Listen, Kannu," said one of the men through the uproar of applause. "We've got something to tell you."

"Yes?" said Kannu, smiling still.

"You know Miko," said the man. "Friend of yours? Well, I'm sorry. He took his act a bit too seriously. Had a so-called Suicide God on the stage, and now he's killed himself. Stuck a knife in his heart to-night. Well, the act didn't go so well, I'm told, maybe that's why he did it. We found your note, so we came to tell you. . . ."

"But — but that's tragic," said Kannu.

"Of course it's tragic. Took himself too seriously. But then, maybe, he wasn't enough of an actor. Not like you, you're an actor, Kannu . . ."

"Sure," said Kannu. "Not like I'm an actor . . ."

In his flat, an hour later, he took up the brown paper parcel containing Miko's idol. "Not like you, you're an actor, too," he said to the idol. There was another knife in his bag, the exact replica of the one he had worn on his fore-arm for so many years. He picked it up, turned it over, and suddenly the old smile came back to his face.

As if on an impulse, he put on his hat, stuffed the idol under his coat, and went out on the Embankment. Behind him, like a majestic backcloth for a tragedian, stood the brightly-lit façade of the Alba Hotel; in front, the dark water, the ripples catching at regular intervals the sheen of the pale Embankment lamps.

There, if they had been watching down the centuries, the gods of ancient clans of China might have seen the end of a dynasty. Flippantly, Kannu drove the quivering blade into the teak idol, and with a wide sweep of his arm, swung it far into the dark river.

Then he turned on his heel, a smiling, trim-built Western gentleman, with only a trace of the East in his placid eyes.

"American citizens," he said to himself, "don't carry knives."

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The Finger of Kali

by

GARNETT RADCLIFFE

MY advice to anyone proposing to loot an Indian temple is don't. You may be lucky and get away with something worth having, but if you do you'll be the exception. Hindu priests are as a rule mild and timid. But where the safety of the temple treasures, of which they're hereditary guardians, is concerned, they're vindictive, merciless and unforgiving.

Apropos of which I propose to relate this story. It divides itself into two parts, separated by an interval of fifteen years. The first concerns myself, when I was a very young soldier stationed at Fattapore, in the United Provinces.

I was an ambitious youngster in those days. Not, I regret to say, for military glory, but for civilian fleshpots. Quick money was what I yearned for. When I'd got it I was going to buy myself out, invest in a yacht and half a dozen cars or so, and live in an English country mansion, with a beautiful wife.

Luckily, or unluckily for me, Fattapore was one of the centres of the gold-hiding industry. It was steamy, hot and very sacred. A teeming, spawning land of mango groves and luscious jungle, where even the birds and animals died young. They had to. In that greenhouse of fierce fertility, everything was pushing everything else on.

I wasn't interested in the flora and fauna. What I liked looking at were the gilded temples, with their domes and grotesque carvings and sly-eyed, shaven priests. It wasn't the architecture interested me either. What I thought about was the treasure they probably contained, and when I passed one I eyed it as a burglar might eye the Bank of England.

But I never ventured into one except once. It was a disused temple about five miles from Fattapore. It was hidden right away in the *bagh* (jungle) and I came across it by accident.

I'd been peacock-shooting with a couple of pals. Somehow I'd got separated from the others, and when I tried to get back to them I missed my way. It's easy to do that in thick *bagh*. Paths seem to close themselves behind your back, and there's a greenish-striped light which confuses your mind.

I wasn't scared. I'd my rifle with me and that gives a chap a lot of courage. Especially if he's never used one except on the ranges. I wasn't afraid of meeting a tiger—I was pessimistic; I wouldn't.

I'd an organ accompaniment as I walked on. There always is an organ playing in the jungle, and the dreary tune it always plays is, "You're only a damn-fool man." The insects, the

birds and the monkeys furnish the music. And there are other things that cough and laugh and watch you, but you never see what they are.

The farther I went on the less bold and carefree I became. I was wet through with perspiration and my head was swimming. And I wasn't as hot as I should have been. In fact, I was quite shivery. That and the fact that my teeth felt tight, should have warned me I was in for a go of jungle fever. It didn't, because I was too damn green.

Then I came to the temple. It was down in a hollow and all but hidden by jungle grass and bamboo shoots. They were so high and thick that they blotted out the sun. It was dark and cool and there was a hidden stream somewhere that made an intermittent chuckling sound like a mischievous old man laughing.

When you've lived a bit in India you sort of get to recognise the places that aren't quite right. If I'd known as much then as I do now I'd have given that temple a wide berth. For it emphatically was not right. Wooden-headed recruit as I was then, I felt as if something was warning me to get away.

Did I obey the warning? Did I snakes! I was the intrepid young adventurer looking for hidden treasure. A fine reckless free-booter I felt as I advanced holding my *bandook* (rifle) like a kid playing pirates.

It seemed very cold and still once I'd got inside. After the jungle it was like suddenly finding oneself in a vault. The inside was in better repair than you'd have expected. The mosaic floor, the carvings, the shrine and the incense-burners were much the same as they must have been when the place was used. Only the roof of the dome had gone badly. There was a gaping hole in the tiles, through which I could see the sky.

Then I noticed a fresh wreath of marigolds on the shrine. I hadn't to scratch my head about who'd put it there, for a priest was sitting at the foot of the shrine with his eyes rolled up, his legs in the lotus-posture and his hands on his knees. He looked about a thousand and may have weighed four stone. He'd a bald head and a little puckered evil clean-shaven face about the size of a baby's.

I didn't mind him. I'd seen holy men in trances till I wouldn't turn my head to look at one. Even the wooden pin he had driven through his cheeks didn't give me a thrill. I'd seen his brothers by the thousand in Benares.

Even if he'd woken up he couldn't have done anything. I was a hefty youngster and I had a rifle. I turned my back on the little naked concertina and started grouting round for treasure.

I'd never been in a Hindu temple before, and my idea that the idols would have ruby eyes for the plucking was soon disillusioned. Nor were they made of gold, as I'd expected. Clay, mixed with chopped straw, seemed to be what the sculptors had economised with.

INTO THE PIT

So I thought I'd try the basement. There was a slab in the flooring near the entrance that looked as if it might be a trap-door of sorts. I hove on to an iron ring in the centre and pulled like Billy-ho.

It wouldn't shift for quite a bit. I kept stopping to wipe my face, and every time I did it I looked at the priest. He drew my eyes like a dead body. You know what it's like in a room where there's someone laid out and you don't like to turn your back?

He didn't budge. He was as still as the idols themselves. And yet I knew he was watching me and thinking about

me. Although he hadn't moved a muscle, he'd changed like a rock does when the light alters.

He knew what I was up to and was laughing at me. I had the feeling so strong that I shouted at him he'd get a thick ear if he didn't stop smiling. I was a bit wrought-up by that time. The gloom and silence of the place had got on my nerves.

Then the slab gave so suddenly I nearly got a fall. It was as if someone who'd been holding it had let go. But I saw a flight of greasy, worn stone steps, and was so excited I forgot to be scared.

They'd take me to the treasure if there was any. I began to go down them striking matches. I was on the alert for anything, but all I noticed was a queer fusty smell like cockroaches and damp paper.

It seemed to be a sort of well I was going into. A round shaft cut in natural rock under the temple, if you get me. The sides were wet and glistening and it was very cold. If I'd had room in my mind to think of anything except loot, I might have imagined myself walking down into a deep grave.

Not me. All I was dreaming of was what I'd find at the bottom. Gold mohurs and jade elephants and necklaces and diamonds like pigeon's eggs. It would be all heaped up in a bronze chest. Ivory pagodas, jewelled fans and little golden gods with ruby eyes.

It takes a lot to scare a fellow when he's chased by a gold-bug. Skeletons wouldn't have turned me back; I'd have kicked them out of the way without turning a hair. I was never one to mind ghosts at any time. And just then with my rifle in my hand and the lust for loot gripping my throat, I'd have dared anything.

Down I clattered into that well. There was just enough light from where I'd lifted the slab for me to see the bottom. And then I stopped in my tracks. I don't know if my hair rose up and my tongue clove to my palate like happens in books, but I do know I was scared stiff. Ugh! I remember I'd a feeling as if my joints were jelly and I'd fall if I moved.

I put my hand against the rock to steady myself and then I began to go up the stairs again. Backwards, for I was afraid to take my eyes from the thing I saw. That'll show you how I felt. If it had been just an ordinary scare I'd have dropped my rifle and bolted.

If the slab had been closed when I reached the top, I believe I'd have fallen down dead. But it wasn't, and I stepped out into the temple. Nothing had moved. The old priest was still at the shrine and everything was silent.

I walked out into the jungle sweating like a horse. I felt like a chap does when he's had such a narrow escape he doesn't like to think back. Then I heard that chuckling stream again. And my mind was so upset that it seemed to me it was speaking in English.

"The young man was excused for his youth. . . . The young man was excused for his youth. . . . The young man was excused for his youth . . ."

Those were the words I thought I heard. Uttered in a sort of wheezy, croaking voice as if a very old man suffering from asthma were speaking. Then the voice got fainter and fainter until there was only the chuckling of the water I couldn't see.

I went away quick. No more dreams of loot for me. All I wanted was to get as far away from that unholy temple as I could. I tell you I went through the *bagh* like a rabbit with the dogs after it.

It seemed hours before I hit a track that took me to cleared ground. That was when I sat down and wondered what had come over me. Why had I stampeded like a scared cat at sight of a piece of polished stone?

That was all I'd seen. Just a plain finger-shaped piece of stone sticking up like a pedestal from the floor of the well. Round and smooth, about six

feet high and two in diameter. A budding pillar like you see in any stalactite cave.

There'd been nothing else. No bronze chests or skeletons or any junk of that sort. Just the stone finger. But when I remembered its rounded top that had been polished by something until it was as smooth and shiny as black glass, I felt cold and sick and shuddery.

I was put in hospital when I got back to barracks. Sandfly fever was what the doctor said. Very likely he was right. I was puffed with bites.

I'd dreams in that hospital that I don't like to remember too clearly even now. Always about the stone finger. I'd be climbing it to get away from something I was afraid to look at. Slipping down no matter how I struggled—you know how it is in nightmares? And there was another nice dream in which I'd see it standing at the foot of my bed beckoning me to follow it. But when the horror was getting more than I could bear, a chuckling voice would say: "The young man was excused for his youth," and I'd wake up sobbing with relief.

LARRY AND REGAN

No more Hindu temples for me! I'd had my lesson and became a reformed loot-hound. Then the regiment was moved to the Frontier, and I forgot to wonder what it was I'd been excused on account of my youth.

Here I shift to the second part. Fifteen years have elapsed, as they say in the books. I'd finished my time with the army, transferred to State Railway as time-expired N.C.O.s of good character commonly do, and become station supervisor at Fattapore. The turn of the wheel had brought me back to the place where I'd commenced my service.

If India hadn't made me rich, she'd taught me a thing or two. She always does if she doesn't kill you first. I'd learned enough, anyway, not to interfere with native customs and not to go prying into temples. Also, not to chuck my weight about. What I mean is that I'd learned that big strong he-men in India who act as such usually end in big, deep graves. The mild, timid Hindu can't use his fists, but he has other methods of self-defence.

Messrs. Larry and Regan hadn't grasped that fact. When I saw them first they'd been in India about three weeks. They were still suffering from the delusion that they were tough and India was soft. India, who has sucked vast armies of the toughest, bravest warriors in the world into her sand like little spilled drops of water!

And Larry and Regan thought they could buck her! They thought they were hellions, king-jacks, old-timers and two-fisted, tough he-men. I daresay in their own environment they would have been cocks of the walk. Larry was tall with a face like burned leather, sunken eyes and a hard, twisted mouth. He was an Australian. Regan was as tall as him and three times as thick—a locomotive of a man with a big bald head and a bristling red moustache. He was an Irish American who'd been mining in South Africa.

First time I saw the pair they were the centre of a commotion; they usually were. They'd just got off the Lucknow express. Larry, who'd a bottle of whisky sticking out of his coat side-pocket, had introduced himself to Fattapore by hitting a native. He was too ignorant to know that seven down-country natives in every ten suffer from

enlarged spleens and are apt to die if you hit them even a soft blow.

This native wasn't dead, but he was wriggling about and making a noise like a frying pig. Several hundreds of the cousins, brothers and uncles were holding a hostile demonstration at a distance of two hundred yards. That was as near as they dared go. I don't blame them. Larry and Regan must have loomed in their eyes like a pair of big red elephants.

I was there to preserve the dignity of the station. Frankly, I wished I wasn't. I'd a wife and two children to consider. However, difficulties are made to be surmounted, and I surmounted this one by inviting that pair of hellions into my office for a drink.

They put on their coats and came along. They were peaceable enough and we talked. I gathered they'd come to India from Cape Town on a business enterprise. They'd put all they could beg, steal or borrow into paying the fare, and they anticipated that in next to no time they'd be rolling millionaires.

"We'll be chartering a P. and O. to take us to Paris," Larry boasted. "Expense no object—champagne for breakfast and whoopee all night. Better come with us. Me and Mr. Regan do things big. In the meantime, could you oblige me with five dollars returnable this day week with five thousand per cent per second commission? Please don't refuse, for I feel hurt very easily."

I didn't want him to feel that, and gave him three rupees. Also some advice about native lodging-houses. They laughed at me when I mentioned *thugs*.

"I guess we don't need anyone to hold our hands," Regan said. "Come on, Larry. The gentleman is tired of our society and there isn't any more whisky."

They swaggered out and my office felt normal size again. I'm no chicken myself, but I was as glad as if I'd said good-bye after a lions' tea-party.

That night they beat up the bazaar, gate-crashed the barracks and threw bottles at a sentry. It was a Mick regiment, and when the guard turned out there was a rough-house you'd have heard a mile away. Larry and Regan got away in a couple of *ekkas* owned by officers and galloped round the cantonment letting off revolvers. When they were tired of that they took possession of a native grog-shop, half killed the proprietor and drank themselves dumb with rice-toddy. I record these facts to show you what sort of fellows they were.

I CONSULT THE FATHER

Three days later they disappeared as mysteriously as they'd come. After an interval to make sure the mad white men had really gone, Fattapore breathed again and took the barricades off the windows.

For my part, I didn't care what became of them, provided they didn't come back. But I'd a friend who took a more Christian view of things. Being a missionary by trade, it was only right he should.

On the second evening after those larrikins had done the vanishing act, Father Ackland, which was his name, came into my bungalow looking worried. He wanted to know if I'd noticed them boarding a train for anywhere, and when I said I had not, he frowned and shook his head.

"I'm worried about those two poor lads," he said. "They know nothing about the country, and are liable to get into trouble. I've heard a rumour they

were seen heading for the hills in a stolen bullock-cart. Let's hope they don't meet any *thugs*."

I said amen to that. For the sake of the *thugs*, I added. But Father Ackland didn't laugh. He knew India a lot better than I did and was really anxious.

Then he told me about a conversation he'd had with Regan. It seemed that Regan, in a comparatively sober state, had called at the mission bungalow and asked a lot of questions about the country round. Particularly about the temples. He'd wanted to know if there was a Hindu temple called "The Temple of Kali's Finger" anywhere in the neighbourhood.

"I told him there was, and I advised him not to go anywhere near it," Father Ackland told me. "It's in ruins now, but a hundred years ago the most abominable rites were practised there. The natives say the place is haunted and shun the spot. I'm inclined to think they're wise. Twenty years ago I visited it myself out of curiosity, and —and I was excused on account of my piety."

He'd croaked the last words. A good imitation. And I knew he had seen the same horror that I had. The finger of Kali.

"Shake hands, padre," I said. "I was let out of hell too. They excused me on account of my youth."

I'd spoken in a thick chuckling voice. Father Ackland turned pale and made the sign of the cross.

"We were both mercifully protected," he said. "I pray the same mercy may be shown to Larry and Regan. I'm certain they've gone to that temple. Probably they've heard some foolish story about jewels being concealed there. God help them!"

"He'll have to. I couldn't go back," I said, my teeth chattering at the thought.

I did go, though. If I hadn't Father Ackland would have gone alone. He said it was his priestly duty. And I was even more scared of his thinking me a coward than I was of the temple.

We went there and then in my car. Since my soldiering days a road had been cleared through the *bagh* to a village not far from the temple. We questioned the natives there and found we were on the right trail. Those two deluded idiots had landed in that village that morning. They'd commandeered the headman's hut and spent the day there drinking and sleeping. In the evening the terrified villagers had watched them go into the jungle in the direction of the temple. "No, we didn't stop them," the headman told us, with chattering teeth. "We thought Kali has summoned them herself. She beckons with her finger when she is hungry."

No natives would accompany us. We went off with lamps in our hands along a beaten path that had been made by worshippers going to the temple. It had been tramped so hard by their feet the jungle hadn't swallowed it. I like the *bagh* by night even less than in the day-time. It's as lively as a city with the voices of things you can't see.

By the time we got to the temple my courage stood about at zero. The place was even more sinister in the moonlight. If Kali herself had come dancing out jingling her necklace of skulls she'd have matched the scene.

Without Father Ackland I couldn't have faced going in. But he gripped my arm and we walked in together. The mosaic floor rang hollow under our feet. The grotesque gods grinned at us. The place seemed to me literally to smell of evil.

There was a little white-robed god squatting by itself near the entrance. Then I saw it wasn't a god, but the same little priest I'd seen before. He wasn't in a trance this time, but he took no notice of us. He'd his head on one side and he was smiling like a contented baby. Harmless and innocent he looked, that little Hindu priest!

TORTURE

We heard what he was listening to. Faint screams. The priest was squatting near the slab that was the entrance to the well. Father Ackland took him by the scruff of the neck and chucked him half across the temple. He crept away whimpering.

We raised the slab. Then we could really hear the screams. I wouldn't have thought human voices could have made such sounds. They were more like the cries of animals being burned alive. Down the steps we rushed. And then we saw them. Larry and Regan. Trapped on Kali's Finger. At least, Regan was standing on it and Larry was clinging to him and trying to get a foothold.

They were fighting one another. Screaming and battling like frantic animals. Far too crazed with fear to notice us.

For a second I couldn't make out what had sent them mad. But when I lowered my lantern, I saw. The floor of the well round Kali's Finger was literally carpeted with snakes. They were wrestling above a forest of hooded expectant heads with cold green eyes.

The snakes knew what was happening and were waiting. When Regan nearly slipped the hooded heads trembled like corn in a breeze. With a superhuman effort he recovered his balance and the snakes were again still.

We could only watch in horror.

We saw Regan drag out his revolver. He hammered with the butt at Larry's face. But you can't loose a madman's grip. Larry had Regan by the throat and he held on, though blood dripped from his flung-back face.

It was a macabre dance of death. They swayed backwards and forwards. We saw Regan topple and slither like a skater trying to keep his balance.

Larry wouldn't let him recover. He clung to him and they toppled out over the snakes. For a horrible second they seemed to be poised in mid-air. Then with a scream that haunts me to this day they fell. Right into the middle of those mottled nightmares. There was a writhing mix-up in the darkness, a squirming tangle, and then nothing except the rustle of scaly bodies slithering over rock.

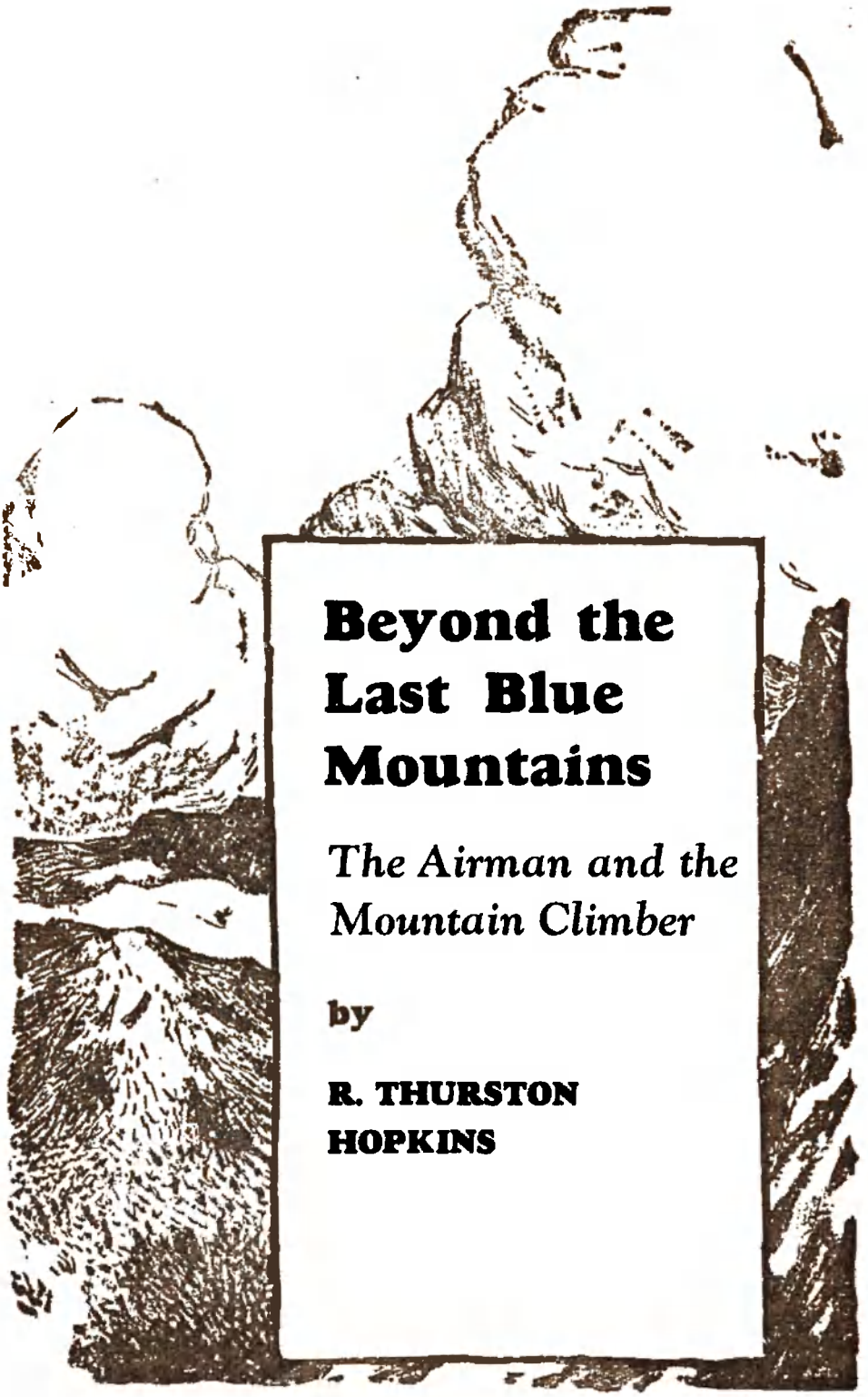
We fled the horrid scene. And when we were once more outside in the moonlight we both heard that devilish, chuckling voice.

"They have been punished for their wickedness," it was saying . . .

An explanation? I can't give one for certain, but both Father Ackland and I have strong suspicions of that little Hindu priest. Those fellows are adept in mesmerism, ventriloquism, telepathy and such-like arts. They protect their temples with mental and not physiial powers.

They were rock-cobras that killed Regan and Larry. Sacred snakes of the temple. Doubtless their ancestors had played a grim part in that temple when human sacrifices were made to Kali.

As for the supposed treasure. Well, to anyone proposing to have a try at getting it, my earnest advice is, don't.



Beyond the Last Blue Mountains

The Airman and the Mountain Climber

by

R. THURSTON HOPKINS

ROSAMOND BLUNDEN met him whilst motoring from Lourdes to Pierrefitte. He was astride a rickety-looking Peugeot motor-cycle which had emerged from many road smashes, only to be patched and fastened with copper wire to take the road again. Rosamond was taking her luxurious Gladiator car down to the Pyrenees, where she intended to indulge in a course of wild mountain scrambling.

But at the moment her temper was rather ruffled. Things were running contrariwise. Her attaché-case, with her purse containing about £20, had fallen out of the car and vanished, it was raining cold grey ramrods and now the car had coughed and spluttered itself to a standstill.

The motor-cyclist dismounted and allowed his machine to fall back with a crash on the grass verge at the side of the road. Rosamond first of all noticed his eyes—they were the palest blue she had ever seen: the eyes of a visionary or a dreamer. She thought that they might belong to the kind of man who invented things, or wrote poems, or even made inflammatory speeches in public squares.

"I fancy," he drawled, "that you are in trouble."

"Oh, I don't put it down as trouble," she replied briskly, "my car has let me down; I have lost all my money and the rain looks like keeping on for the rest of the week."

The motor-cyclist stroked his chin and regarded Rosamond for a moment.

"I'm rather good at doctoring sick motor-cars," he said, flushing. "My name is John Gawdy Nasmyth—unholy name, I know: but no fault of mine."

"Yes, yes," snapped Rosamond. "Real wet rain will wet us through, but names will never hurt us. Do see if you can get my car running again."

On closer inspection, his eyes were kind, and his hands fine, although perhaps a little too sensitive to be capable hands. He had untidy black hair, and was without a hat; was tall, about thirty years old, quick in action, and supple rather than harshly strong.

This is what you would have noticed, not much more, except the clothes—or rather uniform he was wearing. Over a dark blue tunic and trousers he wore a long double-breasted military-looking overcoat. It was faded, greasy and torn, and Rosamond noted with a shudder that two buttons were missing and two others were hanging loose on tag-ends of thread.

Careless and inefficient, thought Rosamond. I suppose he is a motor-coach-driver, or a hotel porter. Well, well, I guess he will always remain a porter.

"I think it's mag. trouble holding you up," he said a few minutes later. "I'll soon put that right. I've got a kind of genius for repairing magnetos."

John noticed that Rosamond was only wearing a flimsy dress.

"But please don't stand in the rain. Oughtn't you to have a coat on?" he suggested. "Yes, you ought . . ."

"Oh, never mind about that. I'm not afraid of a little damp," snapped Rosamond. "Just get the bus running and I'll . . ."

She was just about to say I'll pay you well, when John looked up and smiled. A smile of overpowering brightness, like a boy who discovers that his father isn't angry with him when he confesses that he has put a cricket-ball through the greenhouse window. That smile flung the words back in her throat.

"No mechanical defect beats me for more than a few minutes," said her Samaritan, peeling off his heavy coat and helping her into the thing.

THE COAT

Delicate tinkering with the magneto followed. Then he jabbed at the starter button and the engine sprang to life with a sweet-oily mutter.

Sitting comfortably behind the wheel with the engine running Rosamond thought:

"He's wet to the skin; his clothes are caked with mud through crawling under my car, and he's spent an hour of his time to help me."

She wondered who he was. His voice indicated both breeding and education, and she felt certain that he would be hurt if she offered him money. So she flashed one of her most ravishing smiles on him, thanked him, and drove off.

During the last ten miles to Pierrefitte the encounter rather bothered her. She felt that she had been a little brassy, a little ungracious. And, somehow, this John Gawdy Nasmyth (yes, it was a dreadful name she agreed) had emerged from the encounter with full marks for gentle courtesy. His calm demeanour had rather transposed things—she had driven away feeling small and ineffectual, leaving him cool and master of the situation.

And—(botheration take it!)—she had forgotten to give him back the wretched coat! She was still wearing it. How dreadfully careless she had been!

When she reached Pierrefitte the sun was shining again. Brilliant sunshine poured down on the white walls of the Hotel de France and filled the small square in front of the station. In the lazy late afternoon warmth the hotel looked the laziest and most peaceful spot in the Pyrenees. Nothing living troubled it save two cocker spaniels asleep on the *terrasse*.

Rosamond walked in the lobby of the Hotel de France and after ringing various bells—both hand and electric—the manager emerged from a stuffy little office wedged between the kitchen, hotel restaurant, zinc bar and drawing room.

"Madame——?"

"I should like to garage my car and sleep here for a few nights," Rosamond announced in her most confident French.

The manager bowed, and she noticed a look of mild wonder flit over his face as he "took in" her clothes.

"But perfectly, Mademoiselle," he answered in English. "We have a most beautiful room looking out on the mountains."

"This is not my coat," Rosamund murmured apologetically, as she noticed the manager's eyes fix on it again. "A gentleman lent it to me and I forgot to return it. He was a perfect stranger, who very kindly helped me when my car broke down on the road."

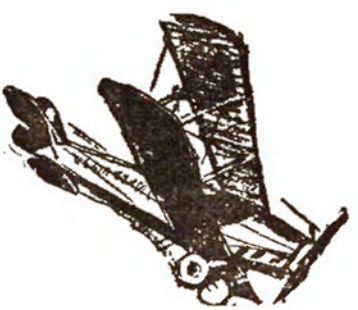
Her tone was confidential.

"You are a stranger, mademoiselle; but not so the coat." His fingers flicked the air. "All Pierrefitte knows that coat. Yes. Perfectly. It belongs to Major Nasmyth. He is an odd type, mademoiselle. He tests aircraft for the French Air Force. He is attached to the military air port at Mabore."

"Major? Army major? But—surely not an army major?"

"You misunderstand perfectly mademoiselle," the manager went on. "The gentleman is veritably a major in the French army. He's an Englishman, of course, but he serves in our grand French army. He is a friend of the Republic. He is quite a figure around this part of the Pyrenees. All the world knows our Major Nasmyth."

THE MYSTERIOUS CRASH



Major Nasmyth? Some small denizen of her consciousness was trying to suggest information about that name. She suddenly realised that the plain Major Nasmyth, separated from John

Gawdy, was somehow familiar to her. It was just a shade odd that the name somehow connected itself with aviation, and just worth a twitch of the memory to account for it.

Ah! Yes! Now she had it. Major Nasmyth had been winner of the King's Cup Air Race in 1933. But that was not the event which had brought his name so glaringly into the public eye. No, notoriety became linked with his name a month or so later, when he "ran off" with a Pandolfo-Cygnet war-plane and crashed in some remote French village.

This Pandolfo-Cygnet smash was an inexplicable affair and started up all kinds of speculations in the newspapers at the time. Questions were asked about it in Parliament, but never satisfastorily answered. The circumstances under which Major Nasmyth had crashed with one of our hush-hush planes five hundred miles from where he should have been flying, were clouded with mists and surmises. Anyway, he resigned from the R.A.F. and nobody heard anything more about him from that day onwards.

Gossip said that an unhappy love affair was at the bottom of it and that he had meant to commit suicide; slander whispered that his nerves had given way, and that he had been drinking heavily for some weeks prior to the accident. Rumours, romantic and fantastic, had floated after his name for some months.

Now he had bobbed up in this remote corner of the Pyrenees! It did not take Rosamond long to guess what had really happened. After the crash he had feared to face the music in England. No doubt the French Air Force had offered him a hole-and-corner job and he had gladly accepted the offer.

"He must be quite an interesting man," said Rosamond.

"Yes, sometimes he has the 'world-unhappiness,' and the people keep away from him," replied the manager. "But he has a heart of gold and I have every reason to believe he is one of the cleverest airmen living. However, you will soon know all about him, for he lives at the hotel. Oh yes, our Major Nasmyth is a wonderful man!"

There was a note of adoration in the hotel-keeper's voice, profoundly sincere, that vibrated. If this fellow Nasmyth could compel a French hotel-keeper to such expression, he must have some mysterious quality which she had failed to appreciate.

A few minutes later Nasmyth chugged up to the hotel on his ancient motor-cycle. He walked up to the tabled *terrasse* and flung himself into a chair. Immediately a waitress rushed out with a bottle of beer and a glass. No doubt she had been waiting for him. She lingered a little, fussing around him and smiling. The manager hurried to welcome him and placed the latest newspapers and a bundle of tooth-picks before him. Then the porter appeared with a three-pound trout, which he dangled before Nasmyth.

"You said trout for dinner," the porter explained, and his smile widened. "And so I go out and catch him."

Certainly, John Nasmyth gave the air of being the owner of the hotel, the universal host. Apparently, he had cast a spell over the entire staff. Ordinary mortals must go up to bedrooms to change boots for comfortable slippers. Nasmyth's special brand of wizardry magicked a chambermaid to his side with his slippers.

It is only the powerful who can command such attention.

Later, Rosamond walked out on the *terrasse* with the coat on her arm, and Nasmyth turned leisurely in his chair.

He opened his eyes in surprise, but Rosamond flushed and somehow felt awkward.

"You!" he cried. "And my coat! I have been imagining all sorts of things about my coat, that you had stolen it, or left it on a scarecrow or presented it to the local museum. Yes, I am glad to see my old coat back—it's just a part

of me. I suppose it seems silly to you. You see, this coat came through several scraps in Palestine and on the Teruel front in Spain . . ." He stopped short and shot one of those dazzling smiles.

"I say what a brute I am. I really meant to say I am glad to see you again. That was very bad, you know, putting the old coat before a lady. Here just take a seat at my table—do, won't you?"

GETTING ACQUAINTED

Rosamund sat down. He was a nice man, she decided. He seemed to take everything in a careless yet serious way. He certainly was a change. He did not pay compliments or make advances.

How long had he been here? In France she meant? Four years? Why on earth was he, an Englishman, in the French Air Force?

"I knew that would puzzle you," Nasmyth laughed. "What I'm doing here, in a sleepy corner of France, just fooling around a French army aerodrome. But I'm sorry I can't satisfy your curiosity. Secrets of state . . . military secrets. Listen!" he added, leaning with sudden eagerness towards her. "My affairs are complicated, and if you are really kind you won't ask me about them. But you will probably hear all kinds of wild tales about me. You need not believe any of them. . . I'm not a hero, and I'm not a craven. Only just an ordinary chap holding down a job.

They talked on: of Biarritz, where Rosamond had spent a month's holiday; of the Pyrenees, which Nasmyth knew from end to end.

"I say," said Rosamond. "Do you go in for mountain climbing?"

"Climbing? Of course I climb!" His hand swept over to the snow-line of the Pyrenees. It hovered like a fluttering-ing bird. "I've climbed all the most dangerous mountains! Yes! Rather. When I first started rock-climbing out here it put the wind up me no end. After I fell off to sleep I dreamt dreams of precipices. I fell down dark pot-holes. I hurtled over precipices, I fell and fell, and floated, and then fell again. I stood on perilous ledges which suddenly crumbled away and left me clinging to a handful of grass.

"I suppose we all feel the same when we first begin rock-climbing. It's like flying. There is something which says very urgently: 'Don't go up to-day; don't climb that wall of rock; take the mule track and be safe."

"Mm," said Rosamond, and pressed her lips together, "I know." But she was thinking. He's always strung up. Been going the pace for some years. Never know which way he's going to jump between fear and reckless bravery. Perhaps his honour would go down at a laugh. So boastful . . . And yet so gloriously foolhardy.

Later, they dined together at a superb mahogany table, which sparkled with some pieces of fine old silver, and next morning they took breakfast in the garden, where cocker-spaniels drowsed in the sun-drenched untidiness of the kitchen doorway, and honeysuckle gave out its swooning sweetness.

"He's most frightfully respectful," said Rosamond to herself. "I might be —no, not the Queen of England, but somebody like Florence Nightingale."

It was an unusual sensation after the over-familiar ways of the Bright Young Men of her own set.

A week passed on wings to Rosamond; wings of such happiness and swiftness, that she could have sworn seven days previously could never have been conceived, much less experienced. One day she took the bus to Luz St. Sauveur and did not return until after dinner, and taking a seat on the *terrasse*

she found Nasmyth there, glowering like an angry schoolboy.

To her great surprise he had tamed his black hair: it was brushed flat and glossy. The change improved his appearance beyond belief. His face, bronzed by the sun, his singular blue eyes and the clear white of his teeth came as a distinct shock to her.

He was wearing a new French uniform and on the tunic a kaleidoscopic row of medal ribbons made an imposing show. He left his table and joined her without his customary:

"May I?"

She chaffed him about his lapse of manners.

"Oh, don't rot, please. I've had a hellish day. I was so worried about you, Rosamond."

"When did I give you permission to call me Rosamond?" She demanded sharply.

He did not reply at once—only scowled fiercely.

"Look here, Rosamond——"

"Look here, John——" she laughed outright. "And why should you be worried?"

"Well, when they said that you went off with ropes and climbing-tackle and when you did not return for dinner I was afraid that you might have met with an accident. Don't go off like that again. I can't bear long days alone. I came up from the aerodrome at lunch-time and the whole place seemed dead without you. I think I shall go dotty when you leave the hotel."

"Really . . . John, don't be foolish. You must square up to life. I can see that you are a box of nerves . . ."

"It's no use you saying 'Really!' in that magnificent tone of voice and lifting those beautiful eyebrows and laughing in that mocking fashion, because——"

"Well?"

With love's quickened instinct she immediately divined a surge of emotion passing through him.

"Rosamond," he whispered, "don't ever go away. While you are here I can face any danger without fear. If you leave me I shall stop living . . . stop breathing freely."

She got up.

"I must go," she said tremulously. She dare not look at him. Her throat and eyes were besieged with waves of burning emotion.

HALF HERO

Rosamond came down next morning in mountaineering kit. She went in for that second-rate kind of mountaineering, which is so dear to dons and American professors. Possibly she was a little more daring than the average woman climber. Anyway, she carried modern equipment—*pitons*, rock-axe, and a length of Beale's famous rope.

"John," she said. "Come with me to-day. Come and be a mountaineer. I want someone to give me tips about modern rock-climbing."

John regarded the frayed gold braid on his tunic and cleared his throat.

"I am sorry . . . I am very sorry but it is impossible. I am testing a new Turret Fury to-day and no one can take my place. I am the only man who can handle this type of machine. My duty is to be on my job when I am called. And, do you know Rosamond, I am filled with dread . . . afraid. Soul and pride are weak to-day. I don't like the idea of taking that flying-dragon up. And yet I am one of the most adventurous flying men in the French air force. Still—good airmen are always temperamental and uncertain people: one day boasting, drinking, malingering and funking; and the next day swimming in ice-cold water, climbing precipices, drinking little and sleeping hard."

Rosamond nodded quietly to herself. His hedging did not deceive her. She knew him for what he was: half-hero and half-braggadocio. His father, she imagined, had put him into the air force

rather against his will, and as a flying officer he must have grappled with dread of flying every day—must have always been urging himself to face and master panic fear.

"Look here, John!" she said, "if you think you are throwing dust in my eyes you are mistaken. Your will-power is vacillating between dread and laziness. You keep on delaying and delaying anything that requires grit and energy. You just float through life like a piece of drift-wood. I suppose I shall find you still sitting at this table drinking and smoking when I return in four hours from now."

"Whoa!" cried Nasmyth. "Don't bully me. I feel despondent and lax this morning. Yes, you are perfectly right, Rosamond. You have discovered the death-beetle which is burrowing in my timbers. I have not the habit of pride. When I feel like funking a thing . . . well, I funk it . . ."

He put his sensitive hands through his rebellious hair and gave her a dim ghost of that bright smile of his, and it clutched at Rosamond's heart so that she could hardly breathe. At that moment in one lightning flash of intuition she knew that she had met the man she was going to love above all others—the man of her destiny.

Her mind was lanced by the thin edge of realisation that she had been ensnared by the very thing which she had always sneered at—fate. Her practical mind had always boggled at any acceptance of Kismet or foreordination. But here she was surrendering to the hand of destiny with just as little concern as she would show over buying a pound of tea. A man who wasted days—a man of futilities and perpetual postponements. She thought of this wildly. Oh! The stupidness of it all! The muddle of life! Hadn't she left college full of degrees and honours. Hadn't she become one of the best women journalists in London? Hadn't she intended to make something tremendous of life? Hadn't she walked about trailing clouds of glory? Hadn't she now everything that a woman could desire—wealth, influential friends, and a bright future?

But it must all be brushed aside. There could be no barrier between her and this chance-met stranger. There he was; leaning back and tilting a glass of wine to his lips, so infernally casual and careless. Here she was. This Rosamond Blunden and this John Gawdy Nasmyth.

MEDALS

Rosamond asked the manager of the hotel about the medal ribbons on John's tunic.

"But don't you know, mademoiselle, he has won many air victories fighting in Spain with the 27th Government Pursuit Squadron, and made a great reputation as a fighting pilot in China. He is the only pilot in the French Air Force to hold the Gold Medal of Honour."

"So brave," said Rosamond to herself . . . "So undisciplined and reckless —and yet sometimes so inclined to drift and sidestep life."

One evening John came in from flying and Rosamond was alone sitting on the *terrasse*. She glanced up as John threw down his helmet and gloves, and then became very still, with a downcast face and hands clenched on the small table.

John walked right by her to the door leading to the small café attached to the hotel. She had seen him walk straight to the "zinc" once or twice before, and knew that he would drink two or three glasses of fiery cognac just to steady his nerves . . .

"John, don't go in yet," Rosamond whispered.

He came back and stood over her, and she looked up without a word, with her face flushed and her eyes alight. He bent down, kissed her lips, lifted her and held her in his arms.

Rosamond gave a little smothered cry to feel herself so held.

"Tell me," he asked, "tell me, don't you care . . . a little?"

"What's the use?" Rosamond struggled a little and said, "You mustn't. . . oh! you mustn't, John." But, even to her, it wasn't very convincing. "I've got my way to make in the world, and you've got your own career. Besides, it would worry me to death every time you tested one of those air demons."

"So you would beworried about me?" he said exultingly.

With a sudden quick movement Rosamond put both her arms round his neck and kissed him.

"Is that answer good enough?" she asked, in a husky whisper, and for a few minutes the world stood still.

That night John persuaded her to go to the Lac Bleu and the Pont of Spain.

"It will be lovely in the moonlight," he pleaded.

And so John drove her in her car to a mountain path which looked up to glaciers, naked rocks and hidden lakes brimming with limpid deep blue water. It was lovely.

Here the old, old story was once more repeated: miraculously, amazingly thrilling to the teller: miraculously, amazingly beautiful to the listener. The story which needs no style or intellectual tricks to make it new and fresh; the story which —in spite of the gibes of pessimists and scoffers—always opens magic casements looking out on færie seas. And John told her something more, which sent a thrilling sensation of relief and joy through her.

"I should like to tell you something rather important," he said. "It can be told in a couple of dozen words. You may have heard that I was the 'bad boy' of the English Air Force, and that I frequently had trouble with my superior officers. That is true in a way, and it is true that I was, and still am, headstrong, undisciplined and often inclined to funk things.

"But one thing is not true about me. I can tell you now because I know that the secret will be safe with you. I did not crash with that Pandolfo-Cygnet battle bomber; I delivered it safely to the French headquarters, acting on orders received from my own government.

"The reports of my crash and resignation from the R.A.F. were put-up stories which were intended to prevent foreign powers taking too much interest in my part in making certain contacts between the French army and our own. I am still an officer of the R.A.F., but I happen to be on special duty with the French army."

THE ROCK DUNGEON

A few days later, Rosamond, climbing in the hills near the Pic de Barane, lost her way. After walking for some hours an impenetrable mist came down on her. One moment the granite peaks around her were landmarks, though dimly seen through a gauzy veil: the next, Rosamond could discern nothing but a blanket of dripping grey, which seemed to press upon her, eager to penetrate to her skin.

The next thing Rosamond remembered was that the ground rose suddenly in front of her. As she topped the ascent she caught her foot in a twisted root and fell down some unseen slope. She rolled in soft grey sand for a few yards and as she rolled torrents of sand poured down on her from above. The

sand choked and blinded her as she fought to brake her downward fall by clutching at small bushes and digging her hands into the sand.

Rosamond must have lost consciousness, for when she recovered she was lying in a pile of soft sand, and the dawn was beginning to break dimly over the edge of the slope down which she had fallen. As the light grew stronger she saw that she was at the bottom of a bowl-shaped crater of rock and sand. Rock walls rose precipitously for sixty feet all around. Rosamond walked round the base of the basin to find some place whence an exit would be practicable.

It was almost certain that some rocky pathway climbed up to terra-firma above her. She had her ropes and climbing-gear, and felt that she could tackle a fairly difficult scramble up. But nothing in the nature of a track-way existed. She was imprisoned in a great rock dungeon, over which brooded a barbarous and depressing air.

Rosamond picked a spot in the face of the wall which could be approached by steep sand-banks, and managed to crawl upwards for about twenty feet, but as she mounted above that height the shifting sand commenced to pour down in tons and sent her rolling to the bottom again.

She was then constrained to turn her attention to that portion of the surrounding rock wall which was free from sand. After all the rock looked solid enough and many of the ledges above were wide enough to rest on. She carried about twenty steel pegs in her ruck-sack and she could drive them into the face of the rock and so work her way upwards.

It would be slow work, of course. Possibly it would take about twelve hours to reach the lip of the pit. Well, she had all the day before her, and if she approached the job resolutely, driving each steel *piton* well into the rock, and making sure that it was perfectly secure before passing upwards, she had nothing to fear.

She hammered in the first *piton* and pulled herself up by it, knotted a rope in its ring and clambered on to a ledge. After three hours' work she had ascended about fifty feet, and was moving up a steep pitch to gain a wide ledge where she could rest before ascending further.

She did not employ *pitons* on the pitch, but cut out small steps with her axe. It was hard work, and the sun was now beating down on her pitilessly. With misgivings she noticed that the rock was softer here. Still she toiled upward —step after step. She could hear the broken rocks falling far below her as she cut her way upwards with the axe. Must be up a good hundred feet now. Wouldn't look down, anyway.

What a fool she was to imagine that she would ever make a climber! Here she was going weak at the knees over just a straightforward spot of mountaineering. She'd never look a mountain in the face again. Now up with the right foot. Where was the foothold?

Where *was* it? Her boot scraped desperately over the rock, but the hob-nails were not biting. Why didn't they bite? Ah-h-h. So that was it. She had cut a step on a soft patch and it had crumbled away. She tested the face of the rock above, right and left with her axe. Here it was as soft as putty.

That was a great shock to her. There was nothing left to do but to descend and try at some other spot. On reaching the bottom of the pit an access of sudden fury took hold of her and she again rushed up the steep sand slopes, yelling and sobbing, but time after time she fell back baffled and bleeding.

Once when she had almost gained a ridge above the barrier of sand a great shelf of water-logged rubble began to slide, and it gathered impetus and volume till it fell with the thunder of an avalanche. Rosamond only just rolled out of the way in time to miss it.

At one corner of the pit she found

a chine. It was as narrow as a coffin, and the rock sides had been worn smooth by the perpetual fall of rain-water. Again Rosamond commenced to drive in *pitons* and ascend. But it was growing dusk, and she was soaked to the skin and chilled to the bone.

When she had toiled up about thirty feet a sudden torrent of water forced her back. Trembling with terror and exertion she staggered clear of it and collapsed. How long she lay there she had not the faintest idea; but she was roused by a voice.

THE VOICE

It seemed that someone was calling to her in a whisper. She could have picked out that drawling call from a thousand other voices. It was John calling. She fancied that she might be delirious, until a handful of wet sand fell at her feet.

She looked up and saw John standing above the ledge which she had reached with rope and *pitons*. But the man she looked upon now was another John. She had not noticed that square-cut chin before, and there was something in his expression which seemed to say:

"We Nasmyths do what we want to do, when we want to do it!"

"Come up the rope to me and bring the rope up after you," said John.

His tone was compelling, and after a moment's hesitation she once more climbed from *piton* to *piton* with the aid of the rope, and stood below the ledge on which John was standing.

"You'll be as safe as the rock of ages with me, darling. I've climbed this pot-hole dozens of times. There are six firm ledges—they run through various layers of sandstone. I know all the hand-grips and foot-holes. Besides, I left steel steps in the upper part of the rock a year ago. I can still see them above me. It'll be child's play getting out now. Don't be frightened," he said tenderly.

At that moment she heard a roll of thunder and saw a dark wall of cloud rushing over from the north-west.

"Throw your rope to me," John ordered. "We must get out of this before the storm breaks. . . . Tie your axe and some spare pegs to the end of it and throw it up."

Now she was nearer to John she noticed that his lips were swollen, and just below an untidy lock of hair there was a trickle of blood. She supposed that a splinter of rock must have fallen and cut his head. There was a wild unearthly light in his eyes, and as she looked up the ridiculous thought came into her mind that this was a spirit and not John Nasmyth at all.

She did as she was bid, and John made the rope fast to the ledge and lowered the looped end to her. She slipped the loop over her head and under her arms; heard John panting with exertion, and was conscious that she was being dragged up the face of the rock. The next moment she found herself safe on the shelf beside John.

"Oh, Rosamond, thank God you are safe," said John softly. "When I heard that you were missing I nearly went mad."

"But your face, John?" she whispered, as he took her in his arms. "Your poor face! Oh! It is cut about so! What has happened?"

John laughed gently.

"Oh, nothing to worry about now, dear. I crashed that Turret-Fury battle-plane a few hours ago. By all the rules of the game I suppose I should be dead, but the rummy part of it is I escaped with only a few cuts and scratches. And yet the plane was smashed to pieces."

A spasm of pain crossed his face, but he smiled, and no woman yet born could see John Nasmyth smile without smiling too.

At that instant the storm burst furiously over the mouth of the pit. They were in the focus of its fury, and every few seconds the lightning struck the rocks above them with explosions like bursting bombs. Small rocks were split away from the lip of the pit and crashed down on each side of them.

Then came a blinding blaze of violet-coloured fire and Rosamond felt as though a sheet of cobwebs had been thrown over her. She awoke a few minutes later to find herself alone. John had vanished. She was filled with sudden dread. Had he been struck with the same flash of lightning that had stunned her?

Presently hail came, and hurricane rain. Combined with the thunder and lightning it made a scene such as Rosamond prayed that she might never again witness. Finally, when she was almost exhausted and could hardly move, there came a providential abatement, and she was able to look about her. She peered over the ledge, expecting to see John's crumpled body on the rocks below her, but not a sign of him could she see.

It certainly was most mysterious. Had she really seen John or was it his ghost? Or had she been dreaming? The encounter was so fantastic that she could not believe it. She looked up above and there she could see the steel steps which John had told her about only a few minutes previously. Anyway, those steel steps were real enough.

She collected up the rope, ice-axe, steel pins and her ruck-sack, and pulled herself up to the first step. Yes, John had done his work well. This step and each one she mounted was driven home and cemented with genuine craftsmanship. In twenty minutes Rosamond had reached the lip of the pit in safety.

As Rosamond tramped down the mule-track to Pierrefitte, she turned the whole affair over and over in her mind. She almost became convinced that some fantasy in her brain had deceived her eyes. Her logical prejudices rose strongly within her, and she passed the occasion just as one might pass from some wild and fantastic screen play to the reality of the crowded streets outside.

She had a confused remembrance of the guests of the hotel bending over her. She knew the glint of a French lady's diamond ear-drops, the gold band around the German's professor's smoking-cap. She sat there vaguely saying over and over:

"Where's John? Has he returned yet? Oh, what happened to John?"

She heard someone whisper:

"Don't tell her yet."

Then the manager came and asked the guests to stand away. He only said:

"Poor child!" and smoothed her hair.

Something in his face smote Rosamond with dread.

"Tell me," Rosamond urged. "Where is Monsieur Nasmyth? Has he returned yet?"

With infinite effort the kindly Frenchman pulled himself together to tell Rosamond the cold truth.

"No, my dear, he will never return again. He crashed at dawn and was killed. All Pierrefitte mourn the loss of a friend and brave gentleman. . . . It is a tragedy. . . ."

Rosamond looked up.

"No, m'sieur," she said with a wan smile. "It is not a tragedy. . . . It is a miracle play."

Then, with her lips parted and her shoulders quivering, she turned suddenly, and walked out on the terrace, and turned her face to the silver-blue line of the Pyrenees.

"Beyond the last blue mountain barred with snow," she whispered. "My dear. Oh! my dear!" She choked and stood with a tear-wet handkerchief gripped in her hand.

The Evil that Grows

Kashoki's Little Bag of Jungle Magic

by M. KELTY

KASHOZI was always a good servant to me, but he never seemed to be really happy. The other natives often used to let off their high spirits in hearty laughter, but this never happened with Kashozi. Though of excellent physique, yet he had about him an air of gloom and a look of perpetual worry, almost of fear. I taxed him with this once or twice, but he always evaded me.

"Is anything worrying you, Kashozi?" I said to him.

The answer was always the same:

"No, Master, no; Kashozi very happy here."

Yet the forced smile and hang-dog look gave the lie to the reassuring words.

I got my first hint of the cause of the trouble when Kashozi was bitten by a mad dog. We rushed him at once to old Doctor Lastrange's house—we were lucky, of course, to have a doctor so near. Thanks to that, the doctor was able to do all that was necessary, but for the rest of the day Kashozi was in high fever.

He tossed and turned and looked, of course, infinitely more miserable than usual. It seemed to me from his mutterings as if he was trying to rid himself of something, something that he dared not part with, though its presence was a terror to him.

In the evening I spoke to another native who had known Kashozi in his early days. But I could get little satisfaction from him.

"Kashozi, him got a little present," he said. "Him too frightened to give little present back. Him not much like little present."

Well, the whole thing was very mystifying. What little present could Kashozi have that was causing him such anxiety? I wanted to get to the bottom of it, but what with leaving for England at the end of the week and Kashozi recovering very quickly, the "little present" slipped out of my mind.

On the trip home, however, it came back to my memory, and I thought I would ask Kashozi if he had brought his "little present" with him. I never saw his dark skin grow so grey, but he quickly recovered himself.

"The evil-that-grows will never harm you, master, Kashozi will guard you even with his life."

The poor fellow was evidently deeply troubled, so I said no more about it, but walked off to my own cabin.

Fog held us up when we reached the Thames. Wandering around, I noticed Kashozi in a corner sitting on his sailor's bag and evidently sleeping. Poor fellow, he didn't care about the air of the lower deck bunks, and I often discovered him up on deck in an uneasy sleep.

As we were still at a standstill, I walked leisurely up to him, and then I noticed a round object by his side. It seemed at first almost like a child's ball which had rolled there accidentally, but as I drew nearer I discovered that it was a bag made of pigskin, very tightly tied up at the top.

Evidently it was intended to be worn round the neck, but the long leather

thong which bound it had frayed, and it had fallen to the floor. The "little present" never entered my mind at the time, but I stooped to pick it up thinking that it might contain some keepsake from Corani, Kashozi's wife.

As I did so, the ship's siren suddenly hooted, and Kashozi woke with a jerk. I will never forget the look of stark horror in his face as he realised I was stooping for the little leather bag. He moved like lightning and got to it first.

I remember thinking how deeply he must value it; and yet I could have sworn that as his brown hand grasped the bag a shudder passed through his body. I looked at him in amazement. Hastily he tied a knot in the thong where it had broken and then passed the loop over his head. As the bag fell on his breast my suspicions were confirmed, for an involuntary spasm of disgust and loathing convulsed his face.

"Dash it all, Kashozi," I said. "You obviously loathe that thing. Chuck it overboard."

But Kashozi shook his head.

"No, master," he said, "Kashozi can never throw away the evil grower. Knumangi avenges any who scorn his gifts."

From that moment I determined to discover the secret of the leather bag. Knumangi was one of the old gods of the swamps, but what he had to do with it, I couldn't imagine.

WELCOME HOME

Amy was waiting for me at the station. Only one who has endured a similar separation can imagine my feelings as I clasped her in my arms.

"So you're back, Empire-builder," she said jokingly.

I felt almost hurt that she could joke at such a moment.

"Amy! You've missed me? There isn't anyone——?"

"Of course not, old sober-sides!" she laughed. "Come along now. Jump into the car and I'll drive you home."

I helped her in and settled myself beside her; Amy determinedly pressed her foot on the accelerator, and I could see there was to be "no nonsense" until we reached home.

"The Grange," where Amy lived with her father, was only separated from our house by a stretch of common whose "Land for Sale" board has not yet attracted purchasers. As we were passing this stretch and I was watching with delight the same old lolloppy English rabbits gambolling among the gorse, Amy turned to me.

"By the way, I must see more of Kashozi. I was always interested in him from your letters, and now he has endeared himself to me still more by insisting on waiting for 'him-bus' so that we could have our drive alone."

"Heavens," I said, "I'd forgotten all about him. He'll be hopelessly lost by now."

"Don't worry," said Amy. "I left Topsy to look after him—though, poor soul, she looked fearfully embarrassed when she saw who she was to take charge of. Well, here we are. You can go home now and then come over and tell us all about wild Africa as soon as they can spare you."

Kashozi went down very well with all the family, yet they all had the same impression of him.

"Why was he so quietly miserable-looking? Had I played the big white boss and knocked all the *joie de vivre* out of him, or something?"

However, I didn't pay much attention to these remarks. My whole horizon was bounded that day by Amy. After we had sat and sat and literally talked ourselves hoarse, we just sat and sat and looked at one another. She was so gloriously the same for, of course, none of my insane fears of her had come true. It was incredible that she had never wanted anyone but me, and yet in this most marvellous world it was true.

Suddenly Amy laughed and spoke.

"Have you noticed, old thing, that

that is the moon shining in at the window and I think Father has dropped his boots a little more often than the process of undressing normally implies."

I, too, laughed, though I must admit I felt a little foolish. However, I quickly said my adieu and walked across the common home. Mother was sitting up for me, and I felt very selfish, having given her so little of my first day home. However, she had no rebuke for me, but mixed me a night-cap and insisted on seeing me to my room.

"We'll put a bit of flesh on those bones for you, my lad," she said. "You look a bit too much like a malaria resurrection case for my fancy at present. And we'll try and brighten up old Kashwoozi, or whatever you call him. Poor benighted heathen, he looks as if he was always seeing a world of ghosts. Well, sleep tight, son, and pull your blind down. The moon is shining full into your room."

As I opened the door I realised the truth of her words. The room was almost as bright as day with that queer, unsubstantial, ghostly brilliance of moonlight on a still and cloudless night. I remembered that the moon was shining like that the night before I met Amy. Sitting up in bed, I had looked over the trees to the house next door, wondering if the little girl we had seen moving in with her father and mother would come out to play the next morning.

Now, as I sat on the edge of the bed aglow with my own delight in living, my thoughts turned—by contrast, I suppose—to Kashozi.

"I wish I could do something for that poor fellow," I thought, and almost without realising what I was doing, certainly before any definite plan of action had formed in my mind, I found myself walking cautiously along the corridor to the room that Mother had assigned for his use. To my surprise the door was open and I crept in.

THE BAG OF MAGIC

The idea of seizing that wretched bag and destroying at once it and Kashozi's mysterious fears, had taken firm root in my mind. Where was the thing? I looked on the dressing-table, on the chairs—everywhere. There was no sign of it.

I stooped over Kashozi, who even in sleep seemed to be crouched in a defensive attitude. The beastly thing was still round his neck. But fortunately it had been tossed on to the pillow and lay a little way from his head. I had my pen-knife in my pocket, and with anguished carefulness I cut the leather thong, seized the little bag, which to my surprise felt somehow damp and spongy, and in a trice I was out of the room.

As I drew the door gently behind me I heard Kashozi groan, as if he were in the uneasy border-line of sleep and waking. Even if he were to awaken, however, I was determined not to give his "little present" back to him. The fire would still be in downstairs, and that would be the best place for it.

Some filthy old charm from the jungle, I supposed it to be, and I was not eager to soil my fingers with it. But as I approached the landing over the ball, I was surprised to see Topsy, our faithful old maid-servant, coming up the stairs. Poor Topsy, it must have taken her some time to get over her journey home with an African native!

Well, I wasn't going to risk meeting her on the stairs. I felt curiously averse to anyone seeing me with that little leather bag. So I turned back to my room intending to get into bed at once. By this time my right hand, in which I carried the thing, was feeling quite wet and clammy.

I transferred it to my left hand, using my right to guide me round the edge of the stairs, for here toe moonlight could not penetrate. Mother had often complained of the darkness in the passage, and I could not switch on my landing

light without Topsy seeing it from below.

Ugh! how clammy my hand felt, and there was a frightful stench—from the bag, I supposed. I raised my hands to my face, but to my astonishment there was no smell there at all.

Now I was at my own room. I went in and placed the thing on the dressing-table, which happened to be most inconveniently placed in the darkest corner. Somehow, I could not go to bed yet. Whether it was the bright moonlight, or the excitement of seeing Amy after such a long time, my pulses were racing far too quickly to sleep.

Should I read a book? No! I felt real life was too interesting to sacrifice it even for a minute to the unreal. I would undo Kashozi's box of tricks. That was it. I might as well see what was inside it.

I took it in my hands and carried it to the window. Would to God I had pulled down the blind and shut out that pallid radiance. Why I could not have done this and switched on the electric light, heaven only knows. On such foolish actions may the most precious life depend.

It took me some little time to unfasten the bag, and in the end I had to have recourse to my pen-knife to cut the thongs. At last it was open, and a grey sponge-like mass protruded itself at once from the top.

What on earth was it? I prodded it with my finger, for the flaccid covering seemed like a kind of fungoid growth. As I did so, I held the thing to the window, trying to peer into the heart of the unpleasant-looking plant, if plant it was.

Just as I did so a light cloud floated away from the moon's face and the rays poured straight into the noisome centre, which I swear was pulsing like a human heart. At the same time an indescribable odour assailed my senses, as suddenly as if a mass of putrefaction had been hurled into my face. It came from the heart of the thing in wave upon wave, conjured up by that cold but almost tropical intensity of the harvest moon.

I almost flung the thing from me. Almost—for immediately following the first rankly nauseating stench I discerned a compelling perfume, so peculiar and absolutely fresh to my experience that I felt I must have more of it. I held the beastly thing nearer to my face, at the same time repulsed and fatally fascinated.

All the time I could feel that faint and sickly pulsing in the centre of the thing. The foul stench surely predominated, and yet I was bound by that faint thread of treacherous beauty which seemed to run through it.

BLOOD LUST

I loved the thing. I would do anything for it. My head was swimming—what matter? Others would try to take it from me. Let them try. I hated them. I loved only it. I hated everyone. I would kill. Yes, that was it, kill—kill—kill.

When I think of the horrible lust for blood that obscene, filthy product of the devil-worshipping jungle had produced in me, even now I feel sick and nauseated.

Kill—yes, that was it. Kill. . . .

My pen-knife was still in my hand. I crept stealthily out of the room. With one last faint glimmering of sanity I felt a faint revulsion on discovering that I had suspended the thing around my neck. Its dark leaves slithered over me at every movement. They slithered to the left, to the right—they caressed me. They would lead me to fulfilment, to blood, to pulsing life and creeping death.

By now I was over the little patch of common. A weasel looked out at me with sharp, frightened eyes, and vanished. I laughed. The stench hung everywhere now, in the webs that laced the larches, on the mist that

hung low on the grass.

What was this frightful stench? Where was it coming from? The house of course—the house ahead. I must reach it and kill. Yes, that was it. Kill. . . .

I awoke, it seemed years later, to the cool sounds and scents of an English early autumn morning. They told me, then, how Kashozi had suddenly run screaming from the house, awakened by what we never shall know. He had run straight across to Amy's house, swarmed up the balcony—he must have traced me by the horrible scent—and snatched at the loathsome charm just as I was lowering my knife towards Amy's throat.

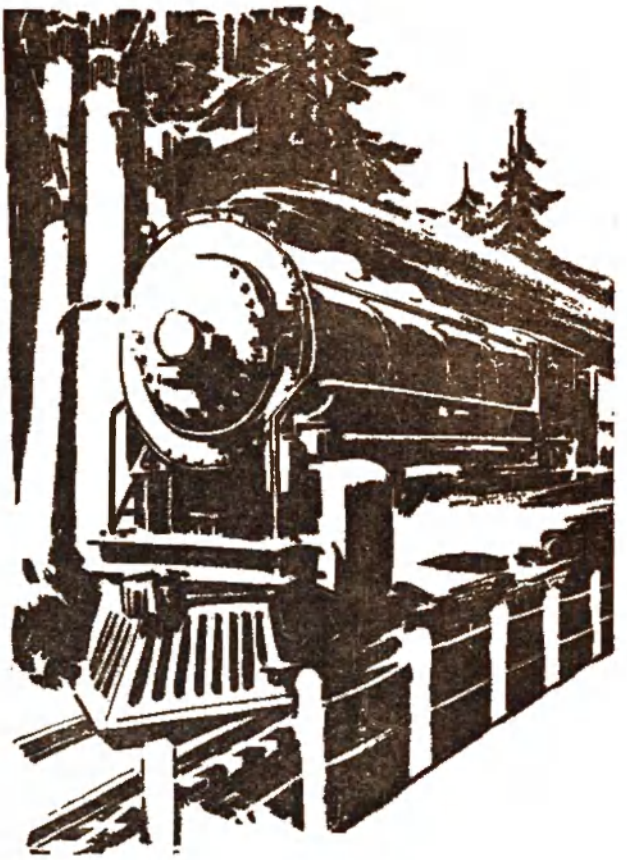
The only thing they could not tell me was why poor Kashozi found it necessary to rush away from the scene and hang himself on a beam in the old coach-house. What happened to his loathsome "little present" also remains a mystery. No one ever saw or heard of it again.

Signals in the Fog

The Grey Figure at the Carriage Window

by

R. THURSTON HOPKINS



ANN HARSON was the one unforgettable woman of my youth. Let me not try to excuse myself by saying:

"She was wonderful and beautiful, but, of course, when I married Nora Gerrard I forgot all about her."

No, I never forgot her. Even if it had not been for the station, she would have continued to live in my memory; fresh and clear.

I call you a station, but my friends who travel up and down the line with me refer contemptuously to you as "a dump." But then they don't know the secrets we share between us, do they, old station?

Your rotting timbers speak to me, and I know your mute language. Your mellow red-brick walls have imbibed shadows of years ago . . . shadows of myself and shadows of dear Ann. Did I say shadows of Ann? Well, shadows perhaps is a moderate way to express it. I think your walls hold something more potent than shadows. . . .

It must have been a blow to you when they electrified the line and expresses, running four to the hour, supplanted the old steam trains and you found yourself closed up and deserted. It's a wonder the strain and vibration hasn't shaken you to bits and scattered you all over the grassy embankment.

I'll confess I forgot all about you. But then, during the first year of my marriage, I forgot about most things which preceded Nora's entry into my life. Most things except Ann.

True, the memory of her suddenly ceased to summon that old dull pain, but, nevertheless, I continued to think about her on occasions, because, beside being beautiful, she was a talented artist, and it was this which was responsible for bringing her features be-

fore my eyes when I least expected it.

Until the day when Nora and I had our first quarrel, you were nothing more than a whissssh as we flashed by, clattered over the set of points and swept round the bend. But on this particular day, I chanced to glance out of the window and caught a fleeting glimpse of your blurred name—Bramling. The next instant we were past, before I even had time to see if the wisteria still climbed over the roof of the waiting-room or the ramblers still entwined the railing running along the back of your platform.

The next day I waited for you and tried the old trick of switching round my head in order to slow up the speed for one instant. Yes, you were looking the same. You hadn't altered a bit since that summer morning when Ann and I stepped out on your platform. Ann, the woman I loved.

That was a long time ago, but the details of that day are a little blurred just as if some artist, such as Whistler, might have painted the picture of my memory.

Remember that morning? Ann with her large, grave eyes and lanky gait of a schoolgirl. Ann in a cool, summer dress and a silly little hat over one eye. Ann saying:

"This is our day, Mart."

Did you know she really meant:

"This is our last day, Mart?"

She was an art mistress and I was a student at the same school. I fell in love with her one day during the anatomy lesson. She wasn't taking the class, but talking to another of the girl students.

I can see her now, wrinkling her brows, her lips slightly parted, swaying on one foot. Then she glanced round and caught me watching her. I looked away, but I could feel her smiling.

One day she came into the life room before the model or any of the students had arrived. I was working on a little pastel. I still have it somewhere. That, too, is a little blurred.

I was too shy to look up, so I pretended to be more interested in my work than in her presence, although this was very much the reverse. I heard her moving about among the canvasses standing with their faces to the white plaster wall, then she walked over to where I sat before an easel and glanced over my shoulder.

DEGAS—AND AGES

"You know, that reminds me of a Degas," she said.

I thought she was suggesting the sketch was not my original idea:

"I didn't copy it," I replied defensively.

"I know you didn't. Degas never drew a leg like that. He would've foreshortened it."

She was right; God knows I was no Degas! I said as much.

She nodded thoughtfully and pursed her lips. "Then why let your admiration get the better of your own expression?"

I shrugged.

"I'm beginning to think I haven't much of my own."

"You talk like an old man. Now if you were my age——"

"You're not a lot older than me," I interrupted gallantly.

"I'm thirty and you're not yet twenty."

She was right again. I was eighteen. It made me angry to think that my youth was so obvious. I wouldn't swallow that about her being thirty. She didn't look a day over twenty-one.

"Are you going to do something?" she inquired suddenly.

"How do you mean?"

"Something worth while. Aren't you filled with an intense longing to create a work of art which will last . . . as long as Degas' has?"

I assured her I was.

"Words, words," she mocked, then, seeing that I was offended, she smiled and asked to look at some of my stuff.

I showed her, and, because I was starved of praise or encouragement, her words of approval were sweet music in my ears. Any artist who has worked alone, experiencing all the doubts of his worth, all the torturing fears of eventual failure, will know what I mean when I speak of finding a kindred soul. Loneliness has killed more artists than lack of food and drink.

Small wonder that I fell in love with her, but great wonder that she should see anything in my callow youth to attract her in return.

I'm very nearly an old man, but I know now that she really did love me. You, too, you mass of sun-blistered boards and faded posters and grime-encrustered glass, you know that for you had a hand in telling me long after it all happened.

I say "after it all happened." Did it ever happen? Sometimes I have a hard job to convince myself.

That first day you saw us. It was the first time we went out together, so you were in at the beginning and the end. There was a wood not far from you. Now it's levelled to the ground and red-roofed bungalows stand on the spot where I kissed her.

Immediately afterwards I exclaimed:

"Gosh, I'll be a famous artist even if it kills me. I've just got to be . . . for your sake . . ."

She drew back out of my arms and regarded me gravely.

"No, not for me, Mart. Not for anything which you can touch or hold, but for yourself. For your real self which doesn't give a darn if others like it or not."

"All right," I said. "For my inner self. But I want you as well."

She shook her head.

"Not both of us. A man can't serve two mistresses."

How right she was. Well, she was right as far as artists are concerned. An artist, if he is going to put the best he can give into his work should not belong to anybody except himself.

You see, artists always have fixed ideas, peculiar mental twists and mercurial tempers, and we both had a double issue of these things. You know what happens when an irresistible will meet an immovable will?

Well, that's what happened to us. Perhaps Ann saw that we should always be wasting hours and days over fruitless arguments; anyway, I understood from the first that we would never marry.

Did you suspect we had quarrelled when we stood on your platform waiting for the train to take us back to the town? We might've sat in your gloomy but sheltering waiting-room and been absurd, but instead a cold silence hung between us which only I by humbling my youthful pride could banish. I did so later, but precious moments were lost, never to be recalled.

The months passed. We never quarrelled again, but all the time I knew she was never for me. If she had been I might have become a real artist. As it is, I earn nice large sums of money painting pretty posters of pretty girls.

THE LAST TIME

Well, the day came at last. You know the last time you saw us? Remember the black look on my face? She had just told me she was going away. Going away. You can have no idea just what those two words meant to me. They spelt the end of everything.

After she told me, I couldn't speak because I was on the verge of tears. Fine romantic lover, I was!

When I could trust myself, I said:

"Why? You can't. Not now. I need you . . . terribly."

She looked away.

"And I you, Mart, but it can't be. Truthfully and honestly, it can't be."

"There's someone else," I accused.

"No . . . Mart. There are just some things more powerful than ourselves, that's all. Perhaps you'll understand one day."

"Understand one day," I cried. "You're treating me like a schoolboy again. You think I'm a child. You don't care a damn. You——"

She silenced me by placing her cool hand over my mouth. I can still feel the soft pressure of that hand whenever I begin to lose my temper.

So you see, I had a little reason to look black while we were waiting for the train to arrive. I saw her for the last time in her seat in the carriage.

A few days later she went away and I never saw her again—or did I?

Yes, I had a very bad time—I still recall. I suffered, I suppose, from a sort of ennui of the imagination. My paintings became cold-blooded and insolent daubs, turned out by the dozen to bring in very desirable guineas. I found myself without an object to hold my will together.

The years rolled past and I met Nora and married her. I forgot the wood which they've built bungalows over and the empty days after Ann had gone. I even forgot I intended to become a real artist.

One evening I was detained late in London—I was employed by a high-class commercial studio which turned out designs for everything from pickle labels to the gigantic posters you see on the hoardings.

I caught the eleven o'clock train from Victoria and had a compartment to myself. Directly we passed through East Croydon station we ran into a dense fog, and it was almost midnight before we slid slowly through Three Bridges.

At regular intervals, signals on the line went off with a bang and through the window I glimpsed an occasional figure silhouette in the flickering light of a flare. I tried to sleep, but could not, and suddenly I began to think of Ann. You say it was curious that I should suddenly think of a woman I had not set eyes on for over twenty years. Well, you're right. It was.

All the painful joy of those hours spent in her company returned, and in my imagination her face was clearer and nearer, yes, nearer than it had been for a long time. I tried to concentrate on Nora and my son at boarding school, but there was a force at work which proved stronger than my will-power. I gave up the struggle and allowed my thoughts to be filled with Ann.

I hardly noticed passing Claywards Heath, and not until we drew up with a jerk did I look out of the window again.

Then I saw you. Cloaked in fog I recognised you, because the train had halted so that my carriage was alongside your dismal waiting-room. No lights gleamed from your outdated lamps. Your windows were in dire need of the attention of a glazier, for the smaller male population of Bramling had registered, in the manner of its kind, its disapproval of a railway station at which trains never arrived and departed.

THE GREY FIGURE

I drew my newspaper over the surface of the window and cleaned away the steam. Peering out I strained my eyes to see inside the waiting-room.

As I peered a figure shaped itself in the gloom of your waiting-room. It looked a mere blot of deeper grey in the greyness, and for an

instant, as it moved towards the door, my heart thumped to the thought that there was something queer, something odd and unnatural in the scene on which I gazed. When the figure passed through the doorway and stood on your platform, I could see that it was a woman. Yes, it was a woman. . . .

Yet there was something lacking, something which I should have found missing as soon as I rested my eyes on her, but for my life I could not have explained what it was. I watched her as she came towards my carriage and I felt that I was watching the awful violation of some physical law, but what law I was unable to think. Suddenly feeling sick and dizzy, I pulled down the blind with a snap.

All the cowardice in my nature urged me to close the inner sliding door of the corridor and to hold it tight unless the hideous thing should open it and sit down beside me. But the other half of me which despises a coward and is capable under pressure of displaying a little courage asserted itself and urged me to pull up the blind again and see what was so queer about the woman.

I released the blind. Pressed close to the window was a face! A face filled with terror and apprehension—the face of Ann Harson. Our eyes met through a fraction of eternity not to be measured by earthly standards of time. She raised a pale white hand and beckoned me to follow her.

As unbidden thought rushed to warn me that the face was not of this world, and that it was not holy, and the sudden knowledge wrung a cry of pain from me so I was left suddenly and dreadfully alone. The window through which the face had looked was empty save for the fog, which was now clearing and drifting by in small clouds.

Under my breath I was talking to myself, as I always did when any crisis found me in a state of agitation.

"Mart, you coward! That was Ann, the woman you loved, and you're afraid of her! She is in some terrible trouble and needs your help. Don't be a coward, go and see if you can help her."

I must have taken my hat from the rack automatically. Certainly I never remembered doing so, just as I never remembered opening the door of the compartment, stepping out on your platform, closing the door behind me and crossing to the entrance of your waiting-room.

I took a step forward into the darkness and called softly:

"Ann. Ann. It's me. Mart. Can I help you, dear?"

There was no reply. Your waiting-room was quite empty. How long I stood there I cannot say, but when I turned, the train was gone. I could just make out the gleaming rails and the flints between the sleepers. The only sound was the dripping of moisture from the overhanging trees on your tin roof.

All fear had left me now. My panic departed as suddenly as it had arrived and the shadow of apprehension had lifted. Indeed, I felt happy and glowing with a strange feeling of relief. As I go back to the rarely visited uplands of my memory I can still recapture that feeling of intense relief.

At the time I did not pause to ask myself why I was filled with that sudden glow of confidence, but later, a few hours afterwards, I paused and said to myself:

"That was the reason for my panic when I stepped out of the train."

After satisfying myself that Ann was not hidden behind your railings or in the shadow of the rambler-roses, I descended your long flight of wooden steps leading to the road.

I managed to wake somebody in the village and induce them to let me use their phone. I told Nora the train had broken down and that in all probability I would not be home until the morning.

Then I walked to the "Shepherd and Dog" inn and put up there for the night.

The next morning at breakfast the landlord said:

"Dreadful accident at the Viaduct last night, sir. About fifty people killed and injured."

"Which Viaduct?" I asked.

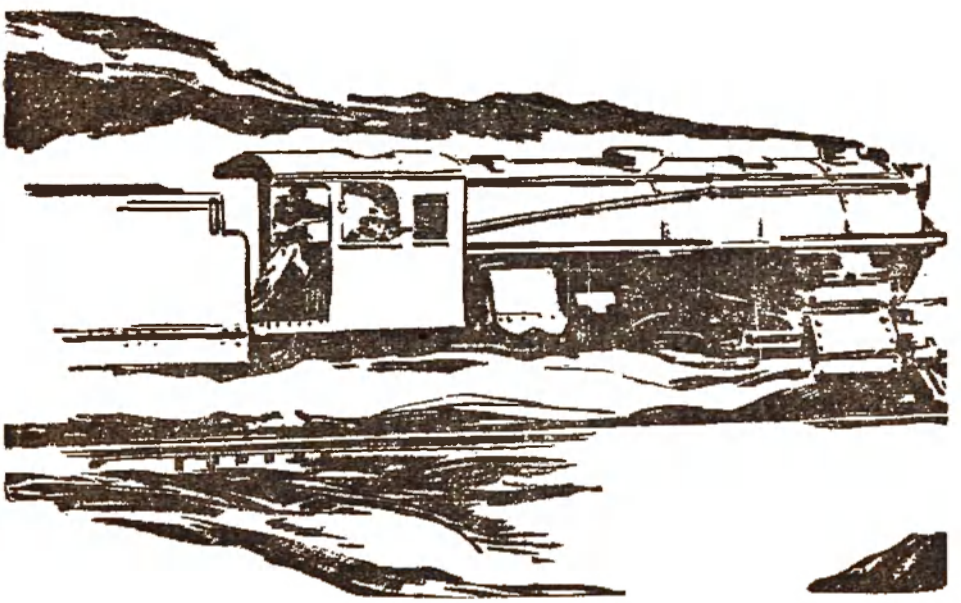
"Barnsbury. Between Bramling and Brighton. Only a few miles along the line. The whole structure collapsed and a train jumped clean off it."

"What train?"

"The eleven o'clock express from Victoria to Brighton, sir," he replied. "The driver of the train seems mighty puzzled about being pulled up by a triple fog-signal at Bramling just before the accident," the landlord added.

"Puzzled?" I cut in. "Puzzled? Why? Fog-signals had been going off all along the line."

"Yes, yes, but not on the five-mile stretch at Bramling. The railway folk have not used fog-signals there for some years. I know that for a fact," said the landlord ruminatively. He paused. "You see, I was the last man who was in charge of fog-signals on that bit of line."



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